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THE NATIONAL GALLERY  
THE NETHERLANDS  
GERMANY SPAIN

BY  
SIR CHARLES HOLMES  
DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL  
GALLERY

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TO THE  
CHAIRMAN AND TRUSTEES  
OF THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY  
MCMIX—MCMXVI



## PREFACE

The Netherlands proved still more exacting. The "Invention" of oil-painting and the tangled history of its first practitioners are still the subject of endless critical discussion. They could not be lightly dismissed. In this latter field I have done no original research, and have to depend on the labours of others, notably on the pioneer work of that fine scholar the late Mr. W. H. James Weale. My debt to one or two well-known Continental authorities I have acknowledged elsewhere, but I cannot leave the subject without recording my particular obligation to that compendium of modern research, *The Van Eycks and their Followers*, by Sir Martin Conway.

The Dutch School seemed to offer a more promising field for compression, since it was out of fashion with the moderns. Rembrandt, of course, and one or two others perhaps would call for detailed treatment, but the remainder could surely be dismissed, not perhaps in the curt paragraph to which the despiser of "bourgeois" painting would limit them, but still with a judicious summary? But there again the attempt to be brief was foiled.

Not only did Dutch painting raise the whole question of Realism—the validity of the ideal of the open window, as distinct from the Sculptural ideals of Italy—but also such practical questions as the nature and use of the "Cabinet picture," and the fundamental differences between painting in Northern and Southern Europe. The full significance of climatic conditions became apparent, and the fact that the Arts in the North,

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whether Fine or Applied, from the seventeenth century onwards, were virtually controlled by the needs of men who had no ready means of escape from the long Northern winter. The Northern winter imposes certain definite limitations not only upon the subjects which the painter can handle with advantage, but upon the size and tone of his pictures and upon the very materials which he employs. To disregard these limitations would seem to be unwise. When, for example, we study the Dutch artists of the seventeenth century we shall notice just the same efforts to be "international" that are talked about to-day. The painters like Both and Berghem, who painted Italian scenery in emulation of Claude, seem to have their exact contemporary parallel in those who proclaim that there is no salvation for us until we all go south to Provence and paint like Cézanne.

The name of Cézanne may remind us that we have as yet no principles of Landscape painting of the same generally satisfactory and comprehensive character as the principles, first tested by the Florentine School, which govern the painting of the human figure. If we have studied the Florentine School to any purpose we can feel on fairly safe ground when we come to consider the translation of Form into values of Mass and Movement. We have indeed gone some way towards translating Form into Values of Light and Colour, but how we are to combine this knowledge with the corresponding translation of Form into Mass and Movement has not as yet been demonstrated. It seems

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possible that in the course of the next few years our ideas about Landscape may be altered, clarified and made coherent by some convincing exposition of the true relation which these elements bear to each other. Should such an exposition be given, it will be surprising if men like Jacob Ruysdael are not found to be among the true pioneers of Landscape, when stripped of the fretful ornaments with which the fashion of the time compelled them to elaborate their creations.

Several of these pictorial problems are discussed in the Introduction ; others suggested themselves naturally in connection with individual painters ; all, or almost all, appeared to have a direct bearing upon contemporary practice. The result is that the allotted space of the book was exceeded before a word had been said about France and England, so that the progress of painting in those two countries must be postponed to a third volume. In conclusion I have to thank the Viscount Dillon and Sir Herbert Cook for permission to reproduce pictures from their collections ; also Mr. W. D. Booker and Miss Barbara Cox for their help in connexion with the photographs required.

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## INTRODUCTION

EUROPE accords to Italy the first place among the Schools of Painting, because there the dominant principles of the graphic arts were worked out and enunciated. We can no more dispense with or disregard those principles than in the world of literature we can dispense with the poetry and prose which we have inherited from Greece. Homer and Aeschylus, or Plato even, may not have any direct bearing upon our modern literary ideals, any more than Michelangelo or Raphael can be profitably imitated by the painter of to-day, but the memory of what these great men have done is of inestimable value as a background to our own aspirations—is something which enables us to live now and then, if only for a few happy moments, in a nobler and more spacious epoch than our own. If here and there that memory helps us to turn a phrase or a contour more largely, or to appreciate any breath of that ancient divine afflatus in the mouth of another, our studies have not been altogether wasted. And in the case of the graphic arts, more definitely than in the case of literature, the analysis of Italian art has helped us to learn much about the elements of picture construction which we could nowhere else have learned so clearly.

## INTRODUCTION

This study of course is not unattended with danger. In Spain, as in Central and Northern Europe, where Italian Art very naturally attracted keen admirers and followers, these followers have rarely proved to be the great men of their age and country. On the contrary, the Italianizer has almost always enjoyed a little contemporary vogue, and then has proved to be a mere empty simulacrum, while the permanent regard of posterity has gone to the painters who retained their national character and show few or no direct traces of Italian influence. To understand this phenomenon we must follow briefly the general course of painting in Southern and Northern Europe.

Painting in Southern Europe, as in the North, was at first dedicated almost wholly to the service of the Church, and the various municipal or trading corporations. Then the massive palaces built by the richer Italian magnates called urgently for decoration, and so began for painters and craftsmen a steady private patronage. By the sixteenth century, many of the noble Italian families were forming art collections, a practice which they continued intermittently up to the time of the French Revolution. Thus Italian painting always retained strong traces of its ecclesiastical or aristocratic origin. Even the easel pictures were direct descendants of the great frescoes with which the walls of Italian churches and palaces had once been covered. Their portraiture likewise retained to the last something of this stately and ancestral character.

In Northern Europe the conditions were different in many ways. The Italian churches had large wall

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spaces available for decoration, because in a land of strong sunshine windows need not be large and numerous. But in the comparatively sunless North the architects sought to preserve every available ray of light. As their constructional science progressed, a church became practically a roof supported by pillars, the whole interval between the pillars being filled with glass. In such a building there was no room for large mural paintings. Any pictures introduced had to be small and, since they would hang near the level of the eye, their treatment would naturally be more precise than was necessary in work that could be viewed from a distance.

Then, as trade developed at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a very large share of the national wealth and influence accrued to the merchants. Rich burghers became the artist's most considerable and valuable patrons. They dwelt for safety's sake in lofty town houses, less spacious than the great palace-fortresses of Italy but perhaps better supplied with material comforts. Here, as in the churches, it was necessary for works of art to be comparatively small. Also the practical and domestic habits of the burgher class compelled the arts which they patronised to have a corresponding character, a character more homely and personal than that which found favour with the Italian patricians. These were the conditions which determined the type of painting which was practised in the Netherlands and in Germany during the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, while the general dampness of the northern climate led to the use of oil

## INTRODUCTION

or varnish mediums in preference to fresco and tempera.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century all began to change. Germany was soon ruined by the Thirty Years War; Antwerp found a powerful commercial rival in Holland; the Dutch, delivered from the Spanish yoke, gained the status of a first-class power both in politics and in the graphic arts. But the factor which revolutionized art in Northern Europe was the transformation which was taking place in men's social habits. The feudal barons of the later middle ages had driven letters and the arts to take refuge in monasteries or in fortified cities. During the sixteenth century the military power and resources of the great nobles came to be either controlled by the sovereign, or utilized by him in a more or less legitimate fashion. The men of peace were thus enabled slowly to steal out from their fortresses and to enjoy the pleasures of country life; less amply perhaps, but no less enthusiastically than the great territorial lords. In the seventeenth century then we witness the rise all over Northern Europe of the country house, an institution which has had a far greater influence upon the arts than is commonly realized.

The possession of a country house, whether large or small, enabled a man to expand his interests to a degree which was impossible while he remained pent up in the streets of a city. His farms, his stock, his poultry, his garden, opened up a new range of delights. Hunting and field sports added to his recreations. All around him was the charm of the country side,

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the fresh air, the woods, the fields and waters. The sudden popularity of landscape painting at the beginning of the seventeenth century was only one of many manifestations of the change thus effected.

But the factor which made the country house of supreme importance for letters, for music, and for the graphic arts, was the Northern Winter. The climate of Northern and Central Europe, in particular of the countries bordering on the North Sea, is often for some six months of the year so cold and damp and gloomy, that a considerable part of the winter season must perforce be spent indoors. The townsman suffered comparatively little from this confinement. A short walk would bring him to the society of his neighbours and enable him to pass the time in conversation or conviviality. The owner of a country house was debarred from such external distractions. Even in the early part of the nineteenth century, country roads were so bad and country ways were so foul that the pleasures of society in wintry weather were necessarily restricted. Each household was compelled in self-defence to be more or less self-sufficient, not only in material comforts but in all that made for the amenities of civilized life.

So the country house became a kind of fortress against the climate; well equipped to withstand the onslaughts of the weather and the possible tedium resulting from them. On the material side, the owner equipped himself with servants and stock and barns and store-rooms and cellars, with much ampler space for the accommodation and entertainment of his friends

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than was possible or necessary in a town. And for his leisure he could divert his mind with books, his eye with pictures, his ear with music. Thus, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the taste of the country gentleman had a dominant influence upon the arts in Northern Europe. The town remained, no doubt, the chief focus of artistic production and of literary enterprise, but the results of all this activity were for a long time absorbed almost entirely by the country house.

Dutch painting of the seventeenth century is for the most part a direct consequence of these conditions. And in this rather unjustly depreciated period English country houses began to form those collections of books and furniture and silver and china and pictures which, within living memory, were perhaps our most charming national asset. Round them centres almost all that is best in English culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For these houses our finest craftsmen worked, our artists painted, and our men of letters wrote their books. Now this epoch of the country house would seem to be over. Taxation brings every year more and more of these old collections into the market to compete with the work of the living artist. The impoverished owner retires to a small flat where he has room for no more than a few prints and drawings. The painter, too, is deprived of what used to be his most valuable patron. Even if this impoverishment of the country-dweller had been mitigated by a wiser public finance, the old state of affairs would not perhaps

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have lasted. Modern travelling facilities render it easy for those who have money to escape the Northern Winter altogether on the shores of the Mediterranean. The motor car, the golf course, and the cosmopolitan hotel provide the new generation with substitutes for the pleasures which their forefathers found in the ancestral home. The servant problem, already acute in all democratic countries, militates still further against the maintenance of large houses, so that the conditions under which art flourished in Northern Europe during the last three hundred years are not likely to recur, even if financial conditions once more become stable.

This art of the country house is, then, the characteristic art of Northern Europe from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Princes might still seek for some offshoot—direct or indirect—from the art of Italy to decorate their palaces; great nobles might, as in France, follow their monarch's lead; painters, usually with more learning than individuality, might try to adapt Italian theories to native methods, but the general types of Northern painting were essentially domestic. Portraiture testified to the continuity of family life: landscape and genre painting offered windows of escape from a man's immediate surroundings, and in Holland, where this form of painting gained its first triumphs, the pictures were often as like windows as human handicraft could make them. Possibly the sombre phenomena of the Dutch winter made the people of Holland peculiarly sensitive to the appeal of warmth and brightness. A painted



## INTRODUCTION

That we may learn from it the safe and sound tradition of using the oil medium is an advantage which most modern painters will not value highly. The methodical process by which a seventeenth century picture was constructed is not calculated to make any striking appeal to an age which desires quite different technical results, which prefers the primary colours to schemes of sober brown or grey, and force of effect to shapely brushwork. Indeed so far have we travelled from the old orderly methods of applying paint that we tend more and more to become haphazard *improvisatori* so far as execution is concerned. Yet the case of Degas indicates that a sound training on traditional lines is no bar to the most daring creation in design and colour, while the universal respect which is paid to his craftsmanship should prove to any young artist that he will not suffer, either in present esteem or in future repute, if he will take the trouble to learn something of the methods by which the finest examples of oil painting have been produced.

The chief ground of fault-finding with seventeenth century work would be its general lowness of tone: a tone which looks darker still by contrast with our bright modern interiors. With regard to the vast majority of seventeenth and eighteenth century painters the charge is not unjust. Oil paint always tends to darken, so that with the passage of time pictures originally sober become dull, and pictures that were originally a little dull become heavy. On the other hand we have in this very same period such acknowledged masters of clarity and brightness as de Hooch

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and Vermeer, and many another vivid painter of interiors or landscape, so that any lack of animation must be ascribed to want of talent in the men using the method rather than to the method itself. Also we must remember that the means used for expression in the arts have a very definite connexion with the results obtained. A lively subject demands for its perfect presentation a corresponding liveliness of treatment and colouring: things grave and dignified call for a corresponding gravity. This last quality the oil-painting of the seventeenth century automatically supplied. The landscapes of Poussin or Ruisdael, the portraits of Rembrandt or Van Dyck would assuredly lose much of their impressive quality were they keyed up to the pitch of a modern exhibition. And though our age with its melancholy memories and forebodings may in general desire cheerfulness, there still remains a place for things that are not cheerful, for a great tragedy in a playhouse, for a grave picture, or for a solemn music, whereby our emotions are "purged," as Aristotle puts it, "of pity and fear." For this reason we should not be too ready to despise the technical processes by which these sombre effects have been most naturally attained, even though we may not often wish to make use of them: the more so because the power of controlling things majestic and profound has always been one of the touchstones whereby the great artist is distinguished from the clever painter.

In a previous volume I have indicated how the noblest examples of Italian painting appear to tend

## INTRODUCTION

towards the condition of a coloured bas-relief. The cabinet pictures of Holland tend in the same manner toward the condition of an open window. If we are students of painting we shall naturally wish to make some rough estimate of the relative merits of these two modes of vision and their bearing upon technical practice; but the two ideals are so entirely distinct that we shall not readily find any common ground for comparison until we go right back to fundamental principles.

When we set eyes on a picture all that we take in at the first glance is a general impression of the design, the pattern of the painted surface. Our primary consciousness is of masses of dark set against light, of one colour against another. A moment later these contrasts of tone and colour and contour begin to stimulate our senses, in proportion to the power of the artist and our own capacity to appreciate him. Lastly, if the painting is to satisfy us for more than a moment, if it is to carry conviction with it, we must feel that we have to do with no mere presentment of externals, but with something substantial, something rich in 'content.' It must, in short, detain us by its Infinity when it has stimulated us by its Vitality.

Now the sculptural ideal with its firm contours, its plain background, its suppression or significant formalizing of details, makes automatically for grandeur of pattern, as it admits the broadest contrasts of colour, and the presentation of solid three-dimensional form in the most convincing way. It is not wonderful therefore that the noblest achievements in figure painting on the heroic scale have been produced in accordance

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with this ideal. To compare with these achievements such a picture as the *Interior of a Dutch House* by de Hooch might seem ridiculous. Yet some such comparison has to be made if we are to estimate the place of Dutch painting fairly, and judge what the ideal of the open window is worth.

In point of vividness of impression the Dutchman must be held to stand the ordeal exceedingly well. The eye is further delighted with the vigorous arabesque of light and dark, to which the tiles on the floor and the rafters of the ceiling each contribute, as well as by flashes of colour so sharply contrasted, so subtly harmonized, and withal so fresh and unexpected as to make most of our Italian favourites seem not a little drowsy or conventional. And what shall we say of the magical light which breaks in through the window to sparkle in the wine glass, to illumine so delightfully the group around the table, and then to spread with such countless reflections and gradations through that large airy room ! Does it not inspire us with some of its own vivacity ? Are not our senses thrilled as by a sudden burst of veritable sunshine upon a cloudy day ? And the figures which are bathed in this light, so vividly rendered and visualized, appear to derive from it a new intensity and substance. We see them only for a moment. The very hand uplifted in wonder seems to shift its place as we look at it, yet by this momentary natural gesture we are convinced more firmly than ever that what we see is a group of real living people.

Here, in fact, Reality is translated into values of

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Light, as in the great art of Italy it is translated into values of movement and volume. And when, as in this picture by de Hooch, the translation amounts to transfiguration—the investing of ordinary things and ordinary people with a magical radiance—we must admit that the result is far from despicable. In its power of exciting our wonder and holding our interest it may even seem comparable to the sculptural dignity of the Italians, though its province is clearly a very different one. Many subjects cannot readily or appropriately be recast in terms of sculpture, because their essentials (as in general with landscape) are too varied, too complicated or too airy, to stand the ordeal of transmutation into solid simple masses. Other subjects again, and these among the most attractive, depend upon refinements of mood or fashion or gesture which, if rendered in any monumental style, would at once become pompous and absurd.

A few of the great Chinese and Japanese masters have undoubtedly succeeded in casting landscape in a heroic mould by setting some large simple form, a great tree or a great mountain, upon a background that is plain or nearly so. Disposing the masses with that feeling for fine proportion which at certain epochs was a natural instinct with the Oriental artist, they were able to produce a form of landscape which is analogous to bas-relief and has undeniable majesty. We however demand more from natural scenery than the masters of the Sung Dynasty, or painters like Eitoku or Korin among the Japanese, thought fit to interpret. I am far from thinking that the possibilities of their







DE HOOCH  
INTERIOR OF A DUTCH HOUSE (DETAIL)





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noble mode of vision are exhausted. But western eyes still hanker after naturalism, and so our artists will probably continue for a long time to explore the various ways of approaching nature which were first opened up by the Dutch.

It was by instinct rather than by reason that the Dutchmen felt their way towards translating natural phenomena into values of light. So when success was achieved here and there the artist himself was not always able to repeat it, while his friends were not able to imitate it or to use it as a foundation for any further advance. Yet if these occasional triumphs were quickly forgotten, they were triumphs none the less; and a few Dutch landscapes, of which Vermeer's *View of Delft* at The Hague is perhaps the finest, rank among the world's most famous things. If we ask ourselves what is the peculiar quality in virtue of which these translations of Reality into values of Light can hold their own with translations of Reality into values of Form, we shall find that Light just like Form needs Vitality, if it is to excite the special intensity of pleasurable feeling which we derive from a great picture. When we compare any good landscape with one which is less good, the deficiency of the inferior work (presuming, of course, a general equality in the designs) will almost always prove to be in the matter of Vitality in the lighting, a fault which we commonly describe as heaviness.

This Vitality would seem to depend upon the suggestion of movement, both in the distribution of the light over the picture surface and in the atoms or

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particles composing it. We recognize this sense of motion in the dramatic accidents upon which Rembrandt seizes, when some sudden instantaneous illumination floods homely persons and homely things with majesty ; we recognize it in the softer transitions of cool light and shadow which drift across the sombre plains and woodlands of Ruisdael. In more recent times we find the same movement of light over Constable's breezy meadows and in the landscapes of his modern anti-type Mr. Wilson Steer. But the most perfect of all examples of this quality, because it is the most subtle, is Vermeer's *View of Delft* at The Hague, where the shadows of the misty clouds overhead float so gently and naturally among the spires and roofs as to make us feel that the place is full of the breath of quiet life under all its ancestral stillness.

Again the movement of light within itself, its vibrant character, is suggested alike by the pulsating shadows of Rembrandt, by the spots and dots with which Vermeer so dexterously enlivens the broad masses in his designs, or by the broken touch of de Hooch in his finest works, a touch which at times anticipates Constable. But the Dutch nowhere interpret the vibration of light with the daring of Turner, or with anything like the scientific 'divisionism' of Claude Monet and the Impressionists. Hence we never derive from their landscapes that vivid pleasure in light pure and simple which some modern painters like Mr. Clausen can give us, who work on plain pastoral themes like those of the Dutch and, by sheer mastery of pulsating light, envelop them with magical splen-

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dour. For want of this vibrant quality the sunlight of Cuyp, like that of his contemporary Claude, is apt to be more drowsy than stimulating. For similar reasons the steady sunlight of our modern realists may often fail to satisfy us.

With the Dutch, this drowsiness, this heaviness of aspect, is increased by the precise and elaborate way in which they paint details. No doubt they inherited their scrupulous habit from the earlier schools, in which such precision might have a certain hieratic beauty and fitness, but in naturalistic landscapes we now see that it was labour misapplied. Not only did it fill every Dutch landscape with small forms, which interfered with the effect of the large masses and, when examined, proved to be of no particular interest or significance in themselves, but it was fatal to the suggestion of movement. Almost all Dutch landscapes for this reason appear static and immobile compared with the best work of the moderns, and no achievement of the nineteenth century in the arts was more valuable than that of Turner and Constable in freeing us from this traditional tyranny. In the more fluid medium of water-colour, freedom of course had been gained long before, but the application of the lessons there learned as to interpreting the accidental and transitory beauties of nature was very slow in coming. With this exception, and it must be admitted a notable one, the Dutch have much to teach us about the transformation of Reality into values of Light, and the presentation of those values in a shape which is thoroughly practical.



PART I  
THE NETHERLANDS



## CHAPTER I

### HUBERT AND JOHN VAN EYCK

EACH of the principal sections of the National Gallery has an attraction of its own, but nowhere probably in the whole building does the average visitor get so much direct and real pleasure as in the room devoted to the early Netherlandish painters. The solemn Italian altar-pieces make demands upon his attention, his sympathy and his imagination with which he may not always be in the mood to comply. Among the Dutch, the French, the Spanish, the English, the mere variety of the exhibits will compel the picking and choosing of favourites. But in the first Netherlandish room almost anything to which the visitor may turn will offer an immediate enticement to the eye. On all sides we find a gem-like richness and translucency of colour, a consummate craftsmanship, with which even the most ignorant and selfsatisfied cannot easily find fault.

But in addition to being attractive the school is exasperating—at least to the serious student. The moment that we quit the simple pleasures of vision, the moment that we attempt to indulge in critical



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comparisons, or even to form definite and precise ideas about any particular artist and his exact relation to his fellows, we are quickly befogged, and the further we carry our studies the more impenetrable does the fog seem to become.

Northern Europe gave birth to no Vasari until it was far too late to collect *viva-voce* reminiscences, or even second-hand information, about the earlier masters. And such chance references to the arts as contemporary documents reveal are frequently at variance with the legends which grew up in later days round the Flemish pioneers of painting in oil. Yet these infrequent documents are all our positive evidence. The reconciliation of this evidence with what passed for history fifty years ago has occupied more than one generation of learned inquirers. In this branch of scholarship England holds a distinguished place through the critical researches of Mr. W. H. James Weale, who laid the foundations of the history of painting in Bruges. To that nucleus the labours of Dr. Max Friedlander and other continental critics have added much ; but much still remains to be discovered. As yet we have materials only for a vague general sketch of the subject. A complete history has still to be written, and from the want of further documents it is not likely to be written in our time, if ever.

Hence it comes that the story of the beginnings of oil-painting in Northern Europe can only be told as a story. Though the story is based upon facts and upon the closest possible deduction from those facts, it cannot be regarded in the same light as a history

## HUBERT AND JOHN VAN EYCK

based from first to last upon documents. There are gaps in the evidence, and some day new facts may come to light which will compel future historians to tell the tale differently. In any case the reader will have to believe in a miracle, in the sudden appearance of a painter, or a family of painters, who in a few decades brought the craft of painting to a perfection which all the genius of Italy could not rival for another fifty years. The phenomenon is without parallel elsewhere in the arts. Those who wish to pursue the question for themselves have authorities in plenty to inform or to confuse them. Here I can merely attempt to summarize the conclusions which an independent study of dates and paintings has compelled me to draw.

The story begins with the birth of one Hubert van Eyck about the year 1366, at or near Maaseyck in the valley of the Maas. He was trained as a painter, probably at Cologne,<sup>1</sup> and on the conclusion of his apprenticeship travelled and sketched in Southern Europe. From this point all is uncertainty until we come upon a picture, *The Three Maries at the Sepulchre* in the Cook Collection at Richmond, and a group of miniatures executed between 1415 and 1417. The picture in the Cook Collection, judging by a certain immaturity, may be a few years earlier than the minia-

<sup>1</sup> Hubert's female type of beauty retains to the end a slightly Teutonic character, analogous to that of the Cologne School. The relatively complete technical equipment of Cologne at the beginning of the fifteenth century is additional evidence that Hubert's innovations in the use of the oil medium were founded upon the current practice in that city, and perhaps developed by association with the masters resident there.

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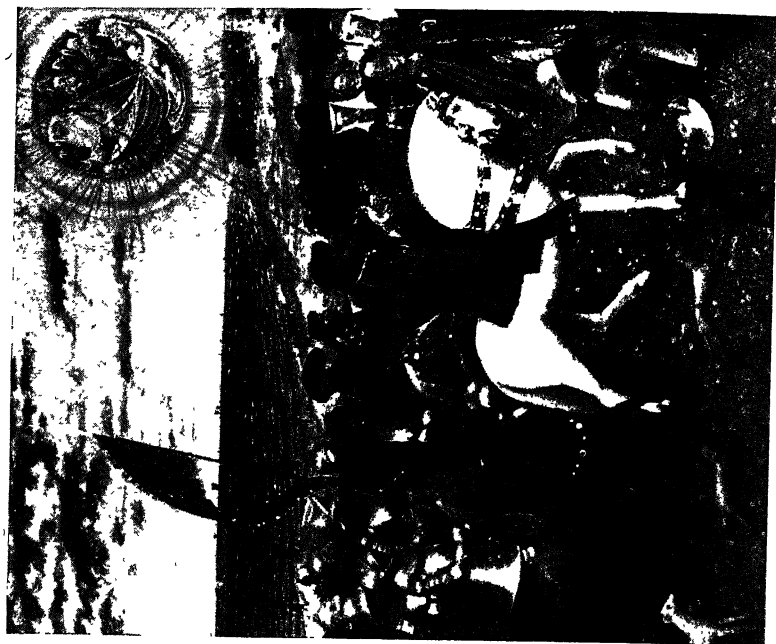
tures, and is the oldest extant specimen of the oil-painting of the Van Eycks.

Hubert's technical innovations are not likely to interest the general reader, and so must be relegated to an Appendix. It will be sufficient in this place to outline the nature of the innovations and the causes which led up to them. The common medium of painters in the Netherlands during the fourteenth century was tempera. In this process the colours are mixed with yolk of egg or size. When the tempera picture was finished, its somewhat pallid tones were enriched, and its surface protected from damp, by a coating of oil varnish applied with the hand or with a sponge. The available varnishes were very thick, very deeply coloured, and dried reluctantly. Vasari, indeed, tells us that Van Eyck was first impelled to his researches by the splitting of a painting on panel which he had placed in the sun to hasten the drying of the varnish. Also it is evident that no great delicacy of colouring was possible in a process where a thick covering of yellow or brown varnish had to be laid over all the tones.

In *The Three Maries* we find these turbid reluctant substances refined to clarity, and applied with a master's touch to the human figure and to delicate landscape effects. An almost perfect art of representation has suddenly come into being. We are in the presence of a two-fold genius, a great artist and a great technical inventor, an artist so great that although he is not represented in the National Gallery, he cannot be dismissed without further discussion of his doings.



HUBERT VAN EYCK  
THE THREE MARIES AT THE SEPULCHRE (DETAIL)



MINIATURE FROM THE "HOURS OF TURIN" HUBERT VAN EYCK MINIATURE FROM THE "HOURS OF TURIN"

## HUBERT AND JOHN VAN EYCK

Fate has been relentless in pursuing Hubert van Eyck. The famous manuscript the "Hours of Turin," containing the group of miniatures to which reference has been made, had hardly become known before it was destroyed by fire in 1903. Fortunately photographic records had been taken, and in these the impression of Hubert's genius made by *The Three Maries* is confirmed. He shows himself a complete and lively master of the human figure, and a landscape painter as well equipped as a modern in the matter of linear and aerial perspective, of natural illumination and atmospheric effect. He draws wind-swept clouds and foaming waves and reflections in water with absolute certainty. Not indeed until the time of Brueghel do we meet with any landscape painter of comparable excellence.

Side by side with this gifted personage there works another figure, a weaker artist altogether, but enabled in the strength of Hubert's inspiration, and probably with the help of his designs, to second him not unworthily. The style of this miniaturist is distinctly feminine. It reappears in Hubert's "Steenken" *Madonna*, painted probably before 1420, while one motive at least from the miniatures, that of the Virgins advancing to adore the Lamb, is utilized and glorified in the Ghent altarpiece. Some very close connexion with Hubert is therefore indicated. If this feminine painter were Hubert's sister, Margaret van Eyck, the necessary conditions would be fulfilled, and the mystery surrounding the "Hours of Turin" would be cleared up. No contemporary document mentions Margaret;

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we do not hear of her existence till the sixteenth century, but she fills this particular gap so exactly that belief in her collaboration with her brother is not unreasonable, and I was pleased to discover even that cautious scholar Mr. Weale inclining to the same view. Lastly it is permissible to suggest that Hubert's younger brother John executed one miniature, if not more, in this wonderful "Hours of Turin," namely that representing *The Birth of the Virgin*, which Sir Martin Conway reproduces as the frontispiece to "The Van Eycks and their Followers." The parallelism with our famous *John Arnolfini* is unmistakable.

In 1417 the death of Duke William of Bavaria put an end to these joint labours upon the "Hours of Turin," and the Van Eyck brothers are soon definitely separated. John van Eyck, now about forty years old, is found by the year 1422 at the Hague, in the service of John of Bavaria. After that prince's death in 1425 he becomes official painter to Philip "The Good," Duke of Burgundy, residing at Bruges or Lille in the intervals of various secret missions for his patron. Hubert meanwhile is established at Ghent with his sister Margaret, and with Petrus Christus possibly as an apprentice. Then was begun that altarpiece, *The Adoration of the Lamb*, which is Hubert's abiding monument.

This marvellous work is represented at the National Gallery only by the watercolour copy made many years ago for the Arundel Society. The copyist, unluckily, has failed to recapture the limpid atmosphere of the original, and time has chilled the reds and embrowned

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the greens which give such freshness and charm to the painting at Ghent. Still this copy, the prints made from it, or any tolerable photograph will prove the quality of Hubert's genius. We have no longer to put up with the rather murky tones, odd drawing and quaint perspective which are found in *The Three Maries*. The mediums used are now of such crystal-line purity that the richest tones of red and blue are rendered with no less clearness than the limpid atmosphere in which the whole scene is bathed. The innumerable participants in the mystic rite, and in particular the larger figures above and on the shutters, are not only seen with an eye independent of all contemporary mannerism, but are rendered with a sense of solidity which could hardly have come except by careful observation of sculpture. Possibly the work of Claus Sluter at Dijon was the source of inspiration, though some of the figures have a grandeur worthy of the best that Italy could then show. Whatever the cause, the result is that Hubert here exhibits a command of solid form no less unique at that date than the feeling for landscape found in the "Hours of Turin."

But in the Ghent altarpiece the landscape motives are translated from earth to heaven. The foaming seas and tragic twilights of earth are done with, for beyond the fair greensward on which the mystic rite takes place, beyond the flowering shrubs and groves which surround it, the spires of the celestial city rise all along the horizon into that serene light which has no need of the sun. It is hard to speak of this miraculous work without seeming extravagant. It springs almost un-



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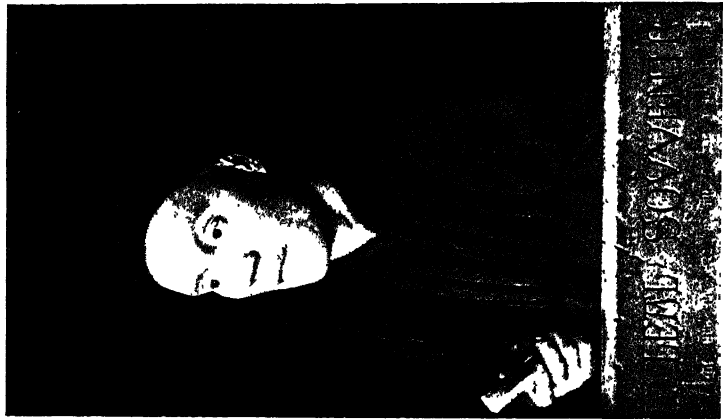
heralded out of an epoch of comparative barbarism, perfect, vivid, jewel-like, and inspired with such a force of spiritual fervour, of rapturous imagination, as to remain as unique now as on the day when it was first revealed to the wondering people of Ghent in 1432.

That day its creator did not live to see. Hubert van Eyck died in 1426, and was buried in the crypt of the Cathedral which contains his masterpiece, his greatness being recorded on a plate of brass inserted into his tomb. Later when the tomb had to be moved owing to alterations, this slab was attached to a pillar of the Cathedral, and the bones of the right arm were enshrined in a casket and placed over the door, a clear proof of the veneration in which Hubert's genius was held by his fellow citizens. As the inscription on the frame records, *The Adoration of the Lamb* was completed by John van Eyck in the year 1432. John, however, was a much occupied man. We know that a considerable part of the six years between 1426 and 1432 was occupied in travelling upon secret missions for the Duke, so that he could have had but few intervals of leisure from his official duties. The view is now generally held that his share in the altarpiece is practically confined to the figures of Adam and Eve upon the shutters. These two figures and a few other details show John's bent towards a searching but prosaic realism. The rest of the picture is all in that vein of glorified and spiritualized mediaevalism which we accept as the essence of Hubert's genius.

We can now turn definitely to John van Eyck and his works in the Gallery. The first of them is dated



HUBERT VAN EYCK  
THE ADORATION OF THE LAMB (DETAIL)



PORTRAIT OF A MAN (290)

JOHN VAN EYCK

PORTRAIT OF A MAN (222)



## HUBERT AND JOHN VAN EYCK

1432, the year which saw the completion of *The Adoration of the Lamb*. John was then a man of about fifty, in high favour with the Duke of Burgundy, living and painting in the society of princes, travelling all over Europe, and altogether a very considerable personage. His fame in consequence became far more widely spread than that of his great elder brother, which soon became little more than a dim memory for those who had not visited Ghent. Our *Portrait of a Man* (290), a friend of the painter's named Timothy if the inscription be rightly interpreted, shows some of the qualities by which John gained his fame. The sitter is seen with an eye so searching, that we feel we know all about him as we examine his likeness. The result may not be very stimulating, for of all Van Eyck's sitters he is perhaps the most ordinary, but the veracity of the portrait is as remarkable as it is in the best work of Moroni. And in point of execution the thing is a marvel. John's eye sees so truly that the niceties of form which bother most draughtsmen do not seem to give him a moment's pause. The form of the eyelids, the thick lips, and the plebeian nose are realized with an easy perfection, which might have had generations of academic training behind it.

Still more wonderful is the *Portrait of a Man* (222) painted just a year later, in October 1433. Here we have clearly to deal with a practised man of the world, as shrewd and observant as the painter himself must have been to justify his place at court. And all the insight into character which this little painting reveals is obtained without any show of emphasis, without any

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of that obvious selection of essentials and rejection of minor details, which (as we saw in the case of the Greco-Roman portraits), is the readiest means of expressing character. Here no detail is omitted, there is no taking of short cuts by means of a strong simple outline or a vigorous forcing of tone contrasts. On the contrary, every tiny contour, every wrinkle, is seen, remembered, set down, and that with a scrupulous minuteness which has left no brush-stroke visible. So far as surface finish and optical illusion can go the thing might almost be the product of some wonderful photographic invention, were it not for a certain crispness in the forms, a breadth of tone in the shadows and an underlying vitality, both of expression and of substance, which no mechanical process can attain. The great red hood sweeping turban-wise round the head contributes no little to this result, but much of it is due to the liveliness and sparkle of the painting itself under all its apparent tranquillity. In after years the art of the Netherlands tried again and again to effect this reconciliation between jewel-like perfection of substance, minute realization of form, and subtle insight into human character. In the attempt it produced many wonderful little portraits, but the rhythmical mastery of material and the just balance of qualities displayed by John van Eyck is never quite found again. It will be noted that this portrait has retained its original simple frame. Upon it are incised the painter's name and the date of completion of the picture: above is the motto "Als ich can." The words are said to be a quotation from a Flemish proverb "As I can, not as I

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will," and so are commonly regarded as a notable proof of Van Eyck's modesty. Yet since five centuries of effort and ambition have failed to rival such accomplishment, we may be pardoned for wondering if the words were not also a sly challenge.

Look, for example, at the way in which the painter writes his name a year later on the wall in *John Arnolfini and his Wife* (186). "Johannes de Eyck fuit hic, 1434," sounds modest enough. But was there ever more superb calligraphy? Every sweep of the brush is a triumphant assertion of power, and surely of humour too? The wayward flourishes to the initial 'J.' and the 'h' dart about with a caprice which is truly elvish. And who before or since ever gave a curly tail to a full stop? Certainly if painter ever had reason for a little flourish of triumph John van Eyck had it when he appended his name to this masterpiece. We are to-day so entranced by the marvel of its workmanship that we tend to overlook or underestimate the still greater miracle which its creation involved.

Here, at a time when Lorenzo Monaco was just dead, when Fra Angelico had some twenty years of activity still before him, a painting is produced showing all the subtleties and refinements of a Terborch. In 1434 Paolo Uccello was wrestling with the elementary problems of linear perspective: John van Eyck by sheer accuracy of observation solves them at once, if with some quite unimportant deviations from mathematical truth. In 1434, the rendering of solid form with the Italians was still in a tentative and semi-geometrical stage: John van Eyck by sheer accuracy of observation

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obtains it at once. In 1434, atmospheric perspective was practically undreamed of: not for two hundred years or more was it studied and rendered with the same subtlety which John van Eyck uses here. Similar examples of largeness of design might no doubt be found in the primitive masters; but we shall hardly find a design of this quality combined with three-dimensional presentation till we come to the seventeenth century. Hubert and John van Eyck are in fact extraordinary phenomena in that they, and they alone, seem to have possessed an absolute accuracy of vision which made them independent of teaching.

One difference in the tenour of their respective visual senses deserves to be noted. The sculptural feeling underlying Hubert's work has the monumental character appropriate to carved stone or marble. The impression made upon him by the sculpture of Burgundy, and perhaps of Southern Europe, was never forgotten. It is an ever present factor in the sense of solidity and dignity, of roundness and fulness which his work produces. In John's work the analogy seems always to be with carvings in wood rather than sculpture in the grander material. It is difficult to convey the distinction in words, and in practice perhaps it does not amount to very much, but for those who look closely the difference exists. Wood of course lends itself to carving readily enough. The scale employed is usually smaller than that customary with stone; wood carving is in consequence less monumental, yet is capable of no less subtlety. Also it is not infrequently more spirited, for the medium is more tractable and responds



JOHN VAN EYCK  
JOHN ARNOLFINI (DETAIL)





JOHN VAN EYCK  
JOHN ARNOLFINI

## HUBERT AND JOHN VAN EYCK

more directly to a lively craftsmanship. The grain of the wood moreover encourages ever so slight an accentuation of the vertical planes, so that figures and features cut in wood tend to be more slender than those wrought in massive impartial stone.

Now turn to John Arnolfini and compare his head with any good Florentine portrait, with Domenico Veneziano, or Botticelli or Andrea del Sarto. Making all allowances for the man's natural meagreness, is there not an essential, though almost indescribable difference in substance? The face seems ever so slightly cut away and thinned out compared with these more solid presentments, just as a fine wood carver would have cut it. Yet with what subtlety and spirit is the man's cold cautious formidable temper revealed? It is easy to imagine why Philip the Good valued John's help. A portrait by his unsparing hand would be worth more as a complete summary of a man's character than any report from a possibly corrupted or cozened ambassador.

Ambassador! The word recalls the well-known saying about Rubens, "*Le peintre Rubens s'amuse d'être ambassadeur.*" We must indeed regard John van Eyck in some such fashion, namely as one of those gifted beings whose talent extended so far beyond their painting that they were able to play a distinguished part in the company of statesmen and princes. John van Eyck's world was doubtless a narrower one than that in which either Rubens or Raphael moved, but it may well have called for qualities of tact and observation no less than theirs. To be the confidant of a

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subtle monarch of the fifteenth century was no sinecure, we may be sure. The responsibility for court ceremonies which overwhelmed Velazquez was but a trifle by comparison. We must think then of John van Eyck as one of the few who have proved that a painter need not be regarded as an unpractical visionary, but may, if necessity calls, join the men of action and serve with credit in their company.

Nor can we see that his painting suffered in quality from the intrusion of worldly and political business into his working hours. We have merely much less of it than he might otherwise have left us. We note occasional inconsistencies of tone and colour, as if the mediums he used were not always equally well clarified. In several pictures, for example, the flesh tones have turned brown. These are faults which were probably inevitable before the preparation of painter's materials became a separate profession, and cannot be used as evidence that John's travels and diplomatic labours had any detrimental effect upon his incomparable skill.

Returning to the *Arnolfini* picture, we note that the design is formal to the verge of stiffness. Arnolfini and his wife divide the picture space almost equally, and their upright figures are emphasized by the window to the left, the bed hangings to the right, and by the chandelier above. The circular mirror on the wall behind, while acting as a foil to all these verticals, tends still further to accentuate the symmetry of the design by serving as its centre and nucleus. Then see with what dexterity Van Eyck has brought life and contrast into this rigid framework. Arnolfini,

## HUBERT AND JOHN VAN EYCK

near the bright light of the window, has a big black hat and dark wine-coloured cloak. His wife, on the opposite side, stands against bed hangings of strong red, wearing white on and round her head, and a vivid green dress with blue sleeves. The left side of the picture is thus conceived chiefly as light and shade ; the right side as colour. We thus have the utmost variety and contrast within the formal unity of the design. Other elements of vivacity are supplied by the unexpected shape of the pattens on the floor, by the lively little terrier, by the sudden serpentine uprising of the fur border to the lady's robe, by the playful extravagance of the signature, and by the sparkling lights on mirror and chandelier. And not one of these stimulating details is obtrusive. All are blended into one complete harmony by the restful atmosphere which fills the room, an atmosphere the like of which we do not find again in art for another two hundred years or more.

Yet this satisfaction of the conditions of Unity, Vitality and Repose will not account for the picture's curious power of retaining our attention, so that we can come to it again and again, and always find some new pleasure in it. We can derive no small satisfaction from the head of Arnolfini himself, which like all other supreme portraits is a microcosm of human character—in this case rather a sinister microcosm. Yet this marvel of psychological rendering is only one of many marvels. Each part of the picture is painted with such dainty minuteness that the eye is led on to search for things still more minute. Thereby the picture attains

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to the mysterious infinity of nature, not by any trick of obscuring form, but rather by defining form so justly and so delicately that the eye of the spectator is baffled and defeated. It does not matter much upon which part of the picture we fix our eyes. Most people are satisfied with the mirror,—that ingenious extension of the narrow room into the vague unknown—and with the glittering miniatures in its frame. But the amber rosary hanging on the wall beside it, the minor details and ornaments of the lady's dress, the very hairs of the dog or the leaves and fruit of the cherry tree outside the window, all will equally well provide material for delight, for wonder and for speculation. Our eyesight will tire and our attention will flag before we can probe half the marvels which this apparently simple composition includes.

Such an infinity of attraction has never been pressed before or since into so small a compass. Other names may sound more largely in the literature of the arts. Many, very many, pictures are more surprising in aspect, and more obviously 'decorative' in effect. But if perennial attractiveness were the sole criterion, we should have to place this *Arnolfini* among the first of all oil-paintings in merit, as it certainly is among the earliest in date. People often ask themselves or others, "Which picture would you choose if you were given the pick of the whole National Gallery?" I have noticed that the answer almost invariably takes the same form. "Well, I suppose I ought to choose the 'Bacchus and Ariadne,' or something of that sort, but if I were really getting a picture for myself I should

## HUBERT AND JOHN VAN EYCK

choose Van Eyck's *Arnolfini*." So this portrait of a grim unpleasant fish of a man standing stiffly by the side of his timid wife has come to be one of the most precious and desirable things of Europe. And the painter, who had no known forerunners except his brother Hubert, has achieved something which all the subsequent centuries, now nearly five, have failed to surpass or in its way to rival.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

THE early history of the brothers Van Eyck is obscure enough. The prospect does not lighten as we approach their successors. Petrus CHRISTUS is the one artist whose connexion with the Van Eyck family is evident, although the nature of it is uncertain.<sup>1</sup> Of our portraits, the *Young Man* (2593) must be the earliest in date; indeed it has one curious point of contact with Hubert van Eyck. The purse which the young man wears is the same as that worn by the donor in a picture at Copenhagen, which, though apparently showing the hand of Christus, was bequeathed by this very donor in 1426 as Hubert's work. Our portrait, and the rather later likeness of *Marco Barbarigo* (696), show Christus to have been a sound and scrupulous painter,

<sup>1</sup> Christus can hardly have known Hubert except as a mere boy. John formed no school. Yet the style of Christus can be traced back through the "Steenken" Madonna at Berlin, already mentioned, to the earlier version in Baron G. de Rothschild's collection, and thence to the 'feminine' hand in the "Hours of Turin." If Christus worked as a boy with Hubert and Margaret, and for a while with the latter after Hubert's death, his knowledge of the Van Eyck technique and his youthful manner would be completely explained.

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but also rather a dull one. Nor does the *Man with a Ring* (2602), for all its pleasant contrast of dark brown with fresh white and blue, materially alter this impression. Even the likeness of *Edward Grimston* from Gorhambury, though painted in a far larger style, and having an impassive Italian dignity about it, is not enough to dissipate the feeling that Christus was a very well trained mediocrity. But he occupies an exceedingly important place in art history, because a recent discovery indicates that he was a channel through which the Eyckian method of painting in oil was introduced to Italy. In 1456 one "Piero di Burges" was in the service of the Duke of Milan together with "Antonello da Sicilia." Those who have studied the technique of Antonello's work will recognize at a glance its analogy with that of Christus, and will see that the identification of Christus with this "Piero di Burges" is almost incontestable. The consequences of this association were far-reaching. Yet we must not exaggerate them. Had Christus never lived, or had he spent all his life in Bruges, Italy would still have acquired, in some way and in due season, a full knowledge of the Netherlandish technique. But Christus happened to be the actual intermediary, and is likely to be more generally remembered on that account than for the pictures which he painted.

With Christus the brief artistic dynasty of the Van Eyck family comes to an end. The main Netherlandish tradition of the fifteenth century centres round another, and till quite recently an even more shadowy nucleus. That nucleus, known to critics since 1898

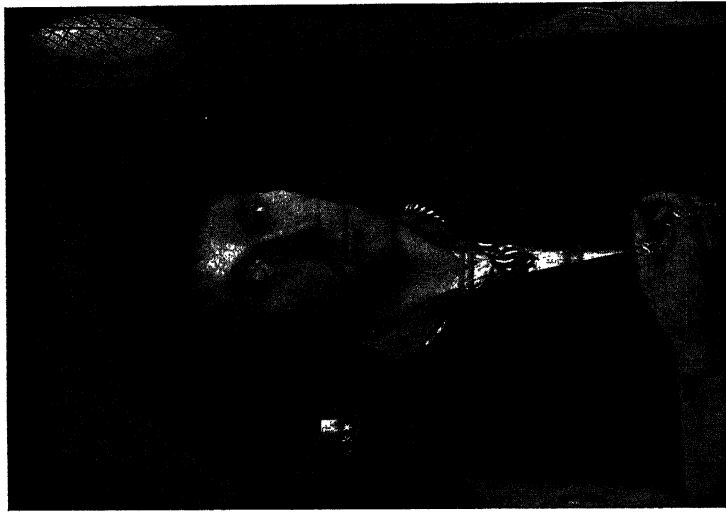


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as the "Mâitre de Flémalle," was at last identified by M. Georges Hulin (perhaps the most brilliant and convincing feat in all modern criticism)<sup>1</sup> as Robert CAMPIN. Documents indicate that Campin must have been born about 1378 (so he was actually older than John van Eyck !) and that nearly thirty years later he settled in Tournai. Of his origin, and of the intervening period, we know nothing except what we may guess from his work. He appears with a knowledge of the Van Eyck technique, which he could hardly have acquired except by having worked under Hubert.<sup>2</sup> Campin's temper however was very different from the gentle Hubert's. There is something fierce, uncouth, provincial about the man, something of the old grim 'Gothic' angularity and contortion, the like of which we see in that *S. Denis* altarpiece in the Louvre, attributed to Bellechouse or Malouel. This character is perhaps reflected in Campin's condemnation to a year's exile because of his dissolute life. His importance to history dates from 1427, when Roger van der Weyden, aged twenty-seven and already famous, came with another artist Jacques Daret, aged twenty-three, to be his pupils. Whatever the reason for these remarkable apprenticeships (they were probably due to the possession by Campin of unusual technical experience), the effect upon Campin's style was notable. In the course of time he succeeded in adding much of Roger's grace and compactness of design to his own original

<sup>1</sup> See *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. xv. (July 1909), pp. 203-208.

<sup>2</sup> As the Virgin's face in the *Marriage* at Madrid would suggest.



PETRUS CHRISTUS : EDWARD GRIMSTON



ROBERT CAMPIN : THE WIFE



ROBERT CAMPIN  
MADONNA

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strength, so that in his later years he is an admirable master. Campin's progress under Roger van der Weyden's influence may be traced through pictures at Dijon and at Aix en Provence to the two panels of 1438 at Madrid, which in all round excellence are his masterpieces.

Dirk Bouts too may well have worked under him, for Campin's *Madonna* (2609) has a similar richness of colour, similar pale flesh tones, and a similar manner of drawing hands and finger nails, to the fine *Madonna* (2595) by Bouts. In its design Campin's *Madonna* shows much of the man's rude native force, and may well be slightly earlier (c. 1420-25) than his association with Roger van der Weyden. The extraordinary type of the Virgin's face, the straw fire-screen so disposed as to make a halo round her head, the massive forms, the large pattern of the design, the firm contours, have the quaint awkward effectiveness of uncultured power; the austere blue-grey of the robe, and the little view of a town seen through the window show the painter to be no mean colourist. Altogether the picture, in its daring, its oddity, and its decision, is worthy of one who was to form a famous 'school.' Our two portraits are even more favourable examples. The *Man* (653A) is vigorous and thoroughly well done; the *Wife* (653B) is altogether charming, not so much for any spiritual refinement, as for her plain pleasant honest freshness, her lively eye, and the ample white linen in which her plump face is set. A little hard and precise no doubt, but still work of such firmness and solidity as to command respect for Campin's name.

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Of works directly due to Campin's influence we possess three. One of them, the *Madonna with Two Angels* (2608), was a design which was so popular in its day, that no less than twelve versions of it are still extant. The second, *Christ Appearing to Mary* (1086), is very like the master himself in one of his uninspired moments. With the third, the *Death of the Virgin* (658), we must deal presently. We may also briefly dismiss Jacques Daret, more famous for the discovery of Campin's identity, made through his person, than for any marked artistic quality of his own. The *Madonna with two Angels* (3379) is no more than one of several works attributed to his later years; his four quite indubitable panels follow closely the style of Campin's *Marriage of the Virgin* at Madrid, and were painted between 1433 and 1435, just after Daret had left Campin's studio.

Campin's other known pupil was a far more considerable personage. Roger de la Pasture of Tournai, commonly known as Roger van der WEYDEN, came of a family of metal workers. Either in this craft or in the allied craft of sculpture he must have achieved fame early, for in 1426, when about twenty-seven, he was received and honoured at a banquet in Tournai as only great masters were received and honoured. Yet within a few months he had entered the studio of Campin as an apprentice. No doubt his purpose was to learn the secrets of the craft of painting, and that he did to so much purpose that, on leaving Campin five years later, he at once achieved a success which lasted without intermission for some thirty years.

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Looking at his subjects with a sculptor's eye (as we may see particularly in his *Descent from the Cross* in the Escorial), Roger not only endowed his figures instinctively with the relief and solidity of things carved in wood or stone, but also grouped them with a simplicity and lucidity which made their significance plain to everyone. Nor was the avoidance of awkward and confused arrangement his only merit. Though no inspired interpreter of the finer shades of human emotion or spiritual exaltation, Roger had at command a satisfactory knowledge of expression and gesture, by which he was able to make the feelings of his characters intelligible, and a sense of grace in line and contour which made for attractiveness. In him the faith of the Netherlands found its first popular exponent, and a visit to Rome in 1450 extended his fame to Italy.

If Roger was no great creative artist, yet he holds a large place in history and we must regret that our representation of him is inadequate. Our *Magdalen* (654) is so near in style to Campin that it was at one time classed under that master's name. But Roger was an artist of finer taste than his teacher, and the work has a delicacy as well as a sculptural feeling about it which are lacking in Campin. Roger's power is best shown in his portraits which are at once sympathetic and incisive: the form of the hand with long sharp finger nails outlined in black is an easily recognized characteristic. Our *Lady* (1433) is a version of a more vigorous and forcible painting at Woerlitz. If it appears to lack the decisive accent of the master's own touch,

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it is at least sufficiently close to him to have been favourably considered by more than one famous critic, and to prove to sceptical minds the high standard of skill to which his studio helpers attained. In the *Exhumation of S. Hubert* (783), we may see a final echo of the school of Campin, Daret, and in particular of Roger van der Weyden. We cannot discuss it at length. It is not a painting of the first rank, though it has some interest as a perplexing pictorial document, and it contains much that will detain and amuse the spectator in addition to puzzling the professional critic.

Christus, Daret, and Roger van der Weyden were practically contemporaries. A fourth painter of the same generation was Dirk BOUTS who was born at Haarlem in 1400. Of his artistic beginnings we know nothing, but through all his work there peeps out a type of man with short legs and a large head, ungainly yet full of rude character, whom we recognize as the ancestor of the Dutch peasant, immortalized two hundred years later by Brouwer and Teniers and Ostade. Bouts must have passed some time in observing his fellow countrymen for this impression to be so permanent, but history has no record of him till he had come South and settled at Louvain about 1440. Our National Gallery pictures help us to fill part of this gap. As already mentioned our *Virgin and Child* (2595) resembles Campin's work so closely as to prove a connexion with that master at Tournai about 1425. Eight or ten years later our *Entombment* (664) shows Bouts in contact or collaboration with Roger van der









DIRK BOUTS  
VIRGIN AND CHILD



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Weyden at Brussels. Bouts, like Campin, clearly learned much from Roger, and the comparative suavity of our two other pictures by him must be ascribed to that beneficent influence.

His natural powers were great. A glance at the *Virgin and Child* (2595) indicates that in point of colour hardly any other picture in a roomful of fine things can rival it. The deep blue of the Virgin's robe and the grey-white flesh tones tell against the red and gold brocade with splendid audacity. The pigments themselves have a depth, a richness, and a quality like translucent enamel, which make the work a veritable gem. And how serene and airy is the little landscape seen through the window !

That these qualities were not dependent upon mere beauty of material is proved by the *Entombment* (664). It is one of the very few surviving relics of the ancient practice of painting in tempera upon linen, a method constantly employed in the Netherlands for banners and large decorations, but necessarily of a much less permanent character than the paintings executed in oil upon strong and carefully fashioned panels. The stains, the faded colouring and other traces of the hand of Time, have failed to destroy the majesty of this painting, and it remains a treasure comparable almost to Van Eyck's *Arnolfini*. The general form of the composition, its coherence, its expressiveness, the reverent sympathy of the figure, the human types presented, all these things we must ascribe to Roger. Roger's designs are always thus compact. Those of Bouts are scattered, and in none of his more personal

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work have we an example of a group so perfectly constructed as this, so unified by one overwhelming emotion. His folk are fundamentally selfish, they stand apart and think apart ; indifferent to those about them. If they do display feeling it is quite transparently insincere. But the genius of Bouts for landscape painting here comes out triumphantly. Nowhere else in the room, not even with Memling, are we taken into a place of such quiet skies, such wide horizons withdrawn beyond swelling hills and great upland pastures. With what fine instinct too does Bouts employ the slender tracery of a tree to enhance our enjoyment of all this light and space and restfulness, just as Perugino and Raphael were to do in after days. The figures are worthy of this noble setting, not only for their character (the head of S. John is perhaps the finest of all) but for their formal dignity and rich austere colouring. The greyish whites, the dull reds and greens and deep blues still combine, cracked and faded as they are, into an unforgettable harmony.

That Bouts was a painter born we can see from his *Portrait of a Man* (943). It is dated 1462 and therefore represents the artist in full maturity. Plain, honest and simple in appearance, like the sitter himself, it is evidently the work of a virtuoso who spread his films of sober paint with so tender a hand that the whole picture seems filled with light. So luminous indeed is the tone that a modern realist might study the work with profit. Had the Netherlandish artists more frequently followed the example which Bouts here gave them, they might have anticipated that triumph of



ENTOMBMENT



PORTRAIT OF A MAN



HUGO VAN DER GOE'S  
DEATH OF THE VIRGIN

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luminism which came with de Hooch and Vermeer, just two hundred years after this little picture was painted. On the other hand to see Bouts at his dullest we may turn to the *Virgin and Child Enthroned* (774); the radiant little passage of landscape is the one thing that remains in the memory.

The next generation of artists in the Netherlands, born between 1430 and 1435, includes two great names, Hans Memling and Hugo van der GOES. The master work of the latter, the great altarpiece of the Portinari family in the Uffizi, proves him to be a master indeed. In addition to many passages of wonderful beauty, the figures of the adoring shepherds in the centre panel are painted with a passion, a realism and a solidity to which even Brueghel, the first of peasant painters, could not rise. And on the wings of the triptych, stately full-length figures of Saints stand erect in landscapes which Bouts himself could not surpass. Indeed in their sense of climate and season, of a quiet day on the uplands in early April, when the lace work of the leafless trees is yet undimmed by sprouting buds, these panels still stand alone. It is unfortunate that this noble artist should be so ill represented here. Two damaged shutters at Holyrood from a large triptych, and a darkened tempera fragment at Christ Church, Oxford, of a once famous *Descent from the Cross*, are almost all that we possess outside London. True, this Oxford fragment is a thing of extraordinary power, but it contains only two heads, and the superb quality of those heads makes us



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wish for something more. That something, however, we shall not find in our *Virgin and Child* (3066) from the Layard Collection. For all its charm this altarpiece cannot well come from Hugo's own hand. It must, however, regretfully, be set down as the work of some able follower, more suave, but far less masterful.

Only one picture remains, the little *Death of the Virgin* (658). In the richness of its colour this vivid panel rivals the *Madonna* by Dirk Bouts (2595). Indeed we might choose either of these works as perfect illustrations of one form of pictorial ideal, in which painting seems to aspire to the condition of a precious stone, so uniformly gemlike is the quality of the colours composing them. Many, perhaps the majority, of the pictures in the same room aim at this jewelled beauty, but in how few of them is there the same glow, the same smouldering fire. And to this beauty of substance there is joined a singular technical perfection; singular because it is not uniform in its character. The head of the dying Virgin recalls the manner of Campin, so too does that of S. Peter. But here the resemblance is superficial, for Campin never modelled a head so solidly, drew a lock of grey hair so firmly, or conceived a like noble anguish. And nowhere else in early art can we find a parallel for the other Apostles, those fierce sunburned passionate beings, or for the sombre formidable figure seated in the corner on the right, except in the Holy Hermits and the S. John Baptist of the Ghent Altarpiece. Hubert van Eyck again is clearly responsible for the angel types, and for the S. John in green who holds the

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candle. If the view through the window be compared with the outwardly similar view in Campin's *Madonna* (2609), the comparatively mechanical and linear character of the older artist's work will become evident. The later landscape is seen by a powerful realist; it is everywhere ablaze with sunlight, which glitters on the buildings and casts sharp shadows all over the little square. Even Hubert van Eyck did not observe nature more closely.

Our *Death of the Virgin* thus contains much which recalls Hubert van Eyck and the Ghent Altarpiece, and a little which recalls Campin. These characteristics are combined with a passion and a technical power which are found only in Hugo van der Goes. Before that master attained to full maturity other influences are to be traced in his work—instead of Campin we find Bouts or Roger van der Weyden—but the substratum of his art, both in treating landscape and figures, is a memory of celestial beauty and earthly fact as they are presented by Hubert van Eyck at Ghent. So we can accept the prevalent view (in the entire absence of documents) that Hugo van der Goes was a native of Ghent, that he was trained there, and that the great masterpiece in that city made an abiding impression upon him, without in any way impairing the idea that in *The Death of the Virgin* we have the earliest of his extant works. In natural genius he is perhaps the strongest of all the Netherlanders: one who in largeness of style and command of solid form can hold his own with the great Italians of the Renaissance; who interprets too the force and fervour of man, the dignity

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of woman and, too rarely, the very soul of landscape with the same instinctive power.

In connexion with Hugo van der Goes we may briefly consider two other pictures. In the refined and elaborate panel representing *A Canon with S. Ambrose* (264), the figure of the Saint has some of Hugo's dignity, as the grey cloudy sky behind,—a remarkable thing at this date—recalls Hugo's naturalism. Something of that master's spirit was carried into France by an excellent artist, the so-called "Maître de Moulins," and here, as in the well-known *S. Victor with a Donor* at Glasgow, we may have a picture which comes from the Franco-Flemish border. The *S. Victor* is notable for its gorgeous colour scheme in which white, full rosy red and rich blue are superbly harmonized. Our picture goes to the opposite extreme. The colours are muted until the panel becomes a maze of delicate pearly tones, and a thing of such unusual beauty as to deserve more attention both from painters and from critics than it has received hitherto. The second picture connected, rather remotely, with Hugo and with France, is far more popular. *The Legend of S. Giles* (1419) is a very delicate and scrupulous piece of work; the minute execution, filmy translucence of colour and quaint subject combining to render it attractive. But it is not the work of a great creative artist, so we must pass on to things more pertinent. Nor need we linger over Justus of Ghent, who was possibly Hugo's studio companion in that city. He went to Italy about the year 1470 and, working at Urbino for Federigo Montefeltre, so

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identified himself with the Italians, in particular with Melozzo da Forli, that his works entirely lost their original Netherlandish character. Our two charming panels of *Rhetoric* (755) and *Music* (756), ascribed to Melozzo, were possibly executed by Justus. They have already been discussed in the volume dealing with 'The Italian Schools' (pp. 24-25).

Hans MEMLING had more individuality. Of his origin and training we know nothing. The form of his christian name points to German extraction, but his work is thoroughly Netherlandish, and records show that from 1467 to 1494 he was a master painter at Bruges. Visitors to Bruges will recall the exquisite examples of his skill, including the famous *Chasse* of S. Ursula, which the Hospital of S. John contains. In London we can form a good idea of Memling's quality by examining the two little panels representing SS. *John Baptist and Lawrence* (747). The figure of S. Lawrence in particular proves that Memling's sense of human beauty and his delicacy of craftsmanship were extraordinary. The drawing of the Saint's youthful head is of rare refinement, and what splendour of colour the master obtains from the white, the cool ultramarine, and the vivid red of the vestments! The little landscape in the background is handled no less tenderly; the trees, the level green-sward and the clear luminous sky seeming to reflect, so far as nature may, the hieratic calm and gentleness of the standing figure. Yet with all these restful elements there is no lack of vigour. All the time that the colours are charming us by their harmony, they stimulate us

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by their freshness and their force. The panel is cool in general tone, and so may be classed with Memling's earlier works. Afterwards he sought and obtained a deeper and more juicy translucence, such as that which we find in our *Virgin and Child Enthroned* (686).

This picture is sometimes regarded as being merely a studio work : on what grounds I cannot quite understand. It is very hard to believe that any assistant was capable of painting that estuary behind with the ship in full sail, a motive since made familiar by the colour prints of Hiroshige, but here invested with an atmosphere of romance, and of voyages far more wonderful than Japanese fishing boat ever made. The drawing of detail in the hands and faces is perhaps rather less firm and less supple than in Memling's finest work, but it nowhere shows the mechanical touch of the copyist or studio helper, while the general pitch of tone and colour, though slightly embrowned, has the master's own vivacity, his characteristic pleasure in contrasting white with rosy crimson and deep blue. A comparison with what may really be a very good studio piece, the *Virgin and Child* (709), will illustrate the distinction. In this last the forms appear to be rounded by some uniform recipe rather than by an accurate sense of the shapes represented : the colour and tone in some indefinable way appear dull and generalized, so that we miss Memling's vivacious accent. It is a thoroughly sound picture with much of the master's feeling, but does not quite sustain the test of juxtaposition to the real thing.

Of Memling's portraits we have a good example in



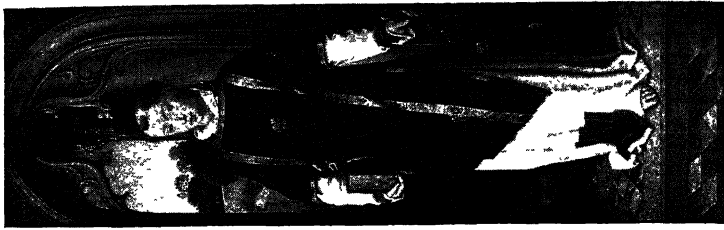
HANS MEMLING  
VIRGIN AND CHILD ENTHRONED



S. JOHN BAPTIST



THE DUKE OF CLEVES  
HANS MEMLING



S. LAWRENCE

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*The Duke of Cleves* (2594), whose pale sensitive face, and dress of crimson, white and black are rendered with the master's personal blend of refinement with vivacity. Again we notice the stimulus given by the flash of white linen upon the darker tones around it. This portrait does not, however, exhibit all Memling's talent in this branch of art. He has left other portraits more firm in contour, more glowing and golden in colour, more imperious in characterization, and modelled with a subtlety and solidity which Holbein himself would not have disdained. But his particular gift of sympathy shows best when he paints men whose natures were kindly and quiet: indeed the instinct by which he invests things fair and gentle with the most rich and stimulating colour, is the secret of the charm he has exerted from his own day to ours.

With the next generation, the painters born about 1460, we begin to touch the sixteenth century and the transference of art and commerce to Antwerp. Before this transfer was finally effected and the art of the Netherlands became, as it were, international, one or two important painters were working who deserve special notice. There was for example the admirable Dutch painter Geertgen tot Sint Jans, unrepresented at Trafalgar Square until now,<sup>1</sup> except by the *Marriage of S. Catharine* (1085), the work of an unknown follower. Though the costumes alone are enough to indicate that the painting belongs to the early part of the sixteenth century, we can still trace the graceful whimsical spirit

<sup>1</sup> See p. 41, footnote.



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of Geertgen in the charming groups which play upon the greensward, while the solemn grove behind them and the chapel with its windows all alight seem like some last quaint vestige of mediaeval romance, some image borrowed from "Le Morte D'Arthur."

Another Dutchman, probably Geertgen's fellow student at Haarlem, was Gerard DAVID. We are fortunate enough to possess examples of his art at every period, and in them can see clearly the stages by which the fifteenth century merges into the sixteenth. *Christ nailed to the Cross* (3067), the painter's earliest accepted work, speaks for his nationality and his training. It is conspicuously Dutch; the type of the stunted peasant soldiery setting callously about their work being just like that which Bouts had utilized long before. The scattered composition and the rich colouring also recall that master. But the head of Christ is a noble invention, and proves that we have to do with a youth of no mean capacity.

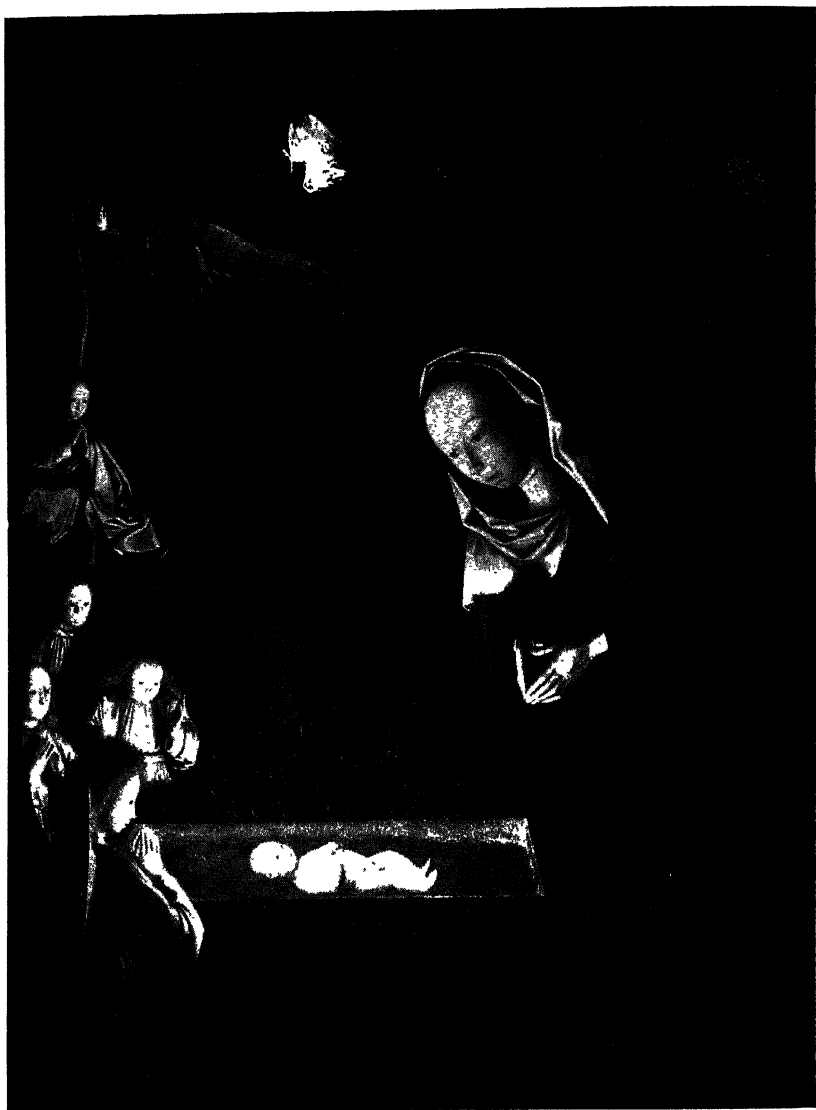
In 1483 David came to Bruges, where he lived and worked for the remaining forty years of his life. Assimilating there the spirit of the Netherlandish art about him, he became himself a Netherlander, a little stiff and dry in his work, but still a grave and sincere artist. Of this change our *Marriage of S. Catherine* (1432) is an excellent illustration. You may think it rather formal in design and rather heavy in tone; it may lack the attraction of saturated colour, the suppleness of touch by which the other Netherlanders delight us, but it has a solid monumental dignity of its own, by the side of which anything short of a master-



GERARD DAVID  
CHRIST NAILED TO THE CROSS



GERARD DAVID  
MARRIAGE OF S. CATHERINE



GEERTGEN TOT SINT' JANS  
THE NATIVITY

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piece will look like a charming toy. The *Canon with his Patron Saints* (1045) carries our knowledge of David a stage further. Here we have a more opulent colouring, and the personages are set in a fine landscape, which proves how much Joachim Patinir learned from David. Yet we see that David is passing his prime. The colouring has become rather metallic, the drawing hard and wiry, the figures have lost their monumental quality. Only their gravity and devoutness remain unchanged.

The characteristic style of David's foliage painting will, perhaps, help us to a solution of the curious problem presented by a pair of pictures, the *Deposition* (1078) and the *Adoration of the Kings* (1079). Close examination of the foliage in the *Deposition* indicates that it is by the same hand as the foliage in the *S. Jerome* (2596), an undoubted late work, and the other pictures by David in the room. The foliage of the *Adoration of the Kings*, is by a different and less steady hand; also the uniform stippling of the faces is that of a professional miniaturist and is not found in David's other works. Though the *Adoration* is signed with the name of David's birthplace "Oudewater" (the signature is almost certainly modern), and its landscape background is said to be like one of David's early sketches, we must ascribe it to the hand of some able follower working on David's design, and perhaps in collaboration with him. When we turn to the figures in the *Deposition*, so clearly influenced by Massys (David visited Antwerp in 1515), we find that, where they are completed at all, they are painted in

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a no less minute but far more masterly style. The head of the Mary kneeling in the right foreground is finished with a delicacy worthy of Massys himself; that it should be mere school-work is unthinkable. In this *Deposition* then we may see the very last phase of David, in touch with the sugary mannerism of Antwerp, yet saved from its corrupting influence by his natural sincerity and reverence. These personal qualities, coupled with his sound workmanship, will always command respectful attention for his painting, although it is not often likely to rouse any warmer enthusiasm.

David, as we know, put away his Dutch beginnings to follow the more cultivated manner which he found at Bruges. What Dutch art was doing, when untouched by these civilizing influences, we may gather from the *Crucifixion* triptych (2922), by the 'Master from Delft.' Here we find the stumpy peasant type of figure swarming everywhere, callous, grimacing and brutal. In the work of Jerome Bosch such figures had been invested with tragic significance. The 'Master from Delft' seems to have drawn them simply because he knew no better. The introduction, or even the extensive use, of a low type of humanity is not in itself a fault. It only becomes so when the use made of it is inappropriate. Rembrandt was frequently depreciated in the bad old times because his models too were Dutch, and plain, and stumpy, with none of the grace and fine proportion of the Italians. But we all see now that if Rembrandt sacrificed formal grace, he thereby obtained what he wanted, and that was character. And character for him included not only

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infinite variety in the thoughts and passions and features of his humble folk, but the power of giving dignity and spiritual beauty whenever he needed them. Indeed Rembrandt became the supreme artistic interpreter of the mission of Christ upon earth, just because he was able to contrast divine majesty with every phase of human weakness and imperfection. In the 'Master from Delft' we have no such contrast, no such wise use of homeliness as a foil to beauty. The folk in his picture are uniformly unattractive; we may find this amusing at first, but when the ugliness loses its novelty it becomes tiresome, nor can all the skilful painting and admirable colour which the picture contains make amends to us.

The 'Master from Delft' worked in the early part of the sixteenth century, but our triptych reflects an earlier and ruder style of work, so that it is perhaps best dealt with a little in advance of its exact chronological place. Jan Mostaert, another Dutchman, also carried his activities well into the sixteenth century; his *Ecce Homo* (3900), however, still shows a force and sincerity worthy of an earlier time, and a linear firmness (in the hands for instance) which recalls Roger van der Weyden. Adriaen Ysenbrandt, too, the pupil of Gerard David, at first continues his master's style. Then he follows in the wake of his fellow pupil, the landscape painter, Joachim Patinir, as we may see in the charming circular *Virgin and Child* (1864). But Ysenbrandt, unlike Patinir, could bring no personality of his own to add strength to a new tradition. He is one of the last minor offshoots of a remarkable epoch, in which minor

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offshoots have attracted the interest of critics and historians largely because their products, and the records relating to them, help now and then to throw some light upon the obscurity surrounding far greater figures. That obscurity has a necessary bearing upon anything which is written about the Netherlandish masters of the fifteenth century, and makes it very difficult not to stray rather frequently from the pleasant ways of aesthetic appreciation into controversial quagmire. Yet so long as the four or five vitally important names are kept conspicuously in view, the reader will suffer no worse damage than a few minutes' boredom, if conscience forbids him to skip all my historical digressions.

It might appear at first sight that the Netherlandish method of painting is so far removed from our modern technique that it can never again be of any practical service. But we have only to cast our thoughts back to the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite 'Brotherhood,' in the middle of the last century, to see that a form of painting having the closest possible analogy to Netherlandish work flourished, and made history, within quite recent times. We might even speculate whether the course of that movement, and the nature of its products, would have been quite the same had Rossetti, and Millais, and Holman Hunt, in their days of youthful fervour, had access to such a collection of Netherlandish work as that which is now on view at Trafalgar Square. Before 1860 we had no example of Campin, or Bouts, or Van der Goes, or Memling, or David, to show that

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the Netherlanders were more than excellent portrait painters. Now that we know them better, it may be that some future turn of the wheel of fashion will put them to a larger use. Their paintings, by their scale, are peculiarly adapted to the small houses in which everybody now tries to live. They have preserved their surfaces, their quality and their marvellous colouring more completely and uniformly than any other kind of painting, short of enamel, which has hitherto been discovered. The limitation of their subject matter to portraiture and to devotional subjects is a mere accident. Their workmanship is extraordinary, and might seem too extraordinary for modern hands and modern eyes, were it not that in those few charmed years when Pre-Raphaelitism was an enthusiasm and a faith, a number of English hands and eyes learned to work with a similar minute definition. And not Pre-Raphaelite only. Have we not indeed our own complete national parallel to the *Adoration of the Lamb* in Frith's *Derby Day*?

While this chapter was in the Press the Trustees had the good fortune to acquire the charming *Nativity* (4081) by Geertgen tot Sint Jans, a work in which that artist's feeling, skill and originality are admirably displayed. The wistful charm of the Madonna and the Angels, the dainty painting of the Child in the manger, are characteristic of him. In the complexity of the lighting Geertgen proves himself no mere painter of pleasant fancies but a real inventor. Piero della Francesca at Arezzo nearly forty years earlier had painted a simple night piece. Geertgen goes much further. Not only does he anticipate Correggio in lighting his foreground group by the radiance emanating from the Child, but in the distance we see the shepherds under the double illumination of their fire on the hill top, and the glory of the angel of the Epiphany which throws their long shadows down the slope. It is an effect which a century later Elsheimer was to repeat, and thereby show the way to Rubens and to Rembrandt.



## CHAPTER III

### THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

BEFORE the end of the fifteenth century the fame of the artists of the Netherlands had spread all over Europe. The native talents of France, of the Rhine provinces and of Southern Germany adapted the Van Eyck method to their respective local needs : Spain imported both painters and paintings from what she regarded as a Spanish colony. Even Italy did not disdain first to enrich her traditional tempera-painting with oil, in the Netherlandish style, and then to discard tempera in favour of the Northern medium. The rare depth and translucency of colour and the minute finish which the Netherlanders obtained were qualities in which even the uneducated could take pleasure. The traders of the Netherlands were not slow to realize and exploit this popularity. Antwerp had become the great commercial metropolis of the North, so to the wealth of Antwerp gravitated in time all the talent which half a century before had been content to develop in the smaller cities, and had preserved thereby a certain local vigour and character. The princely patron who had ordered pictures for his own personal use, or at least

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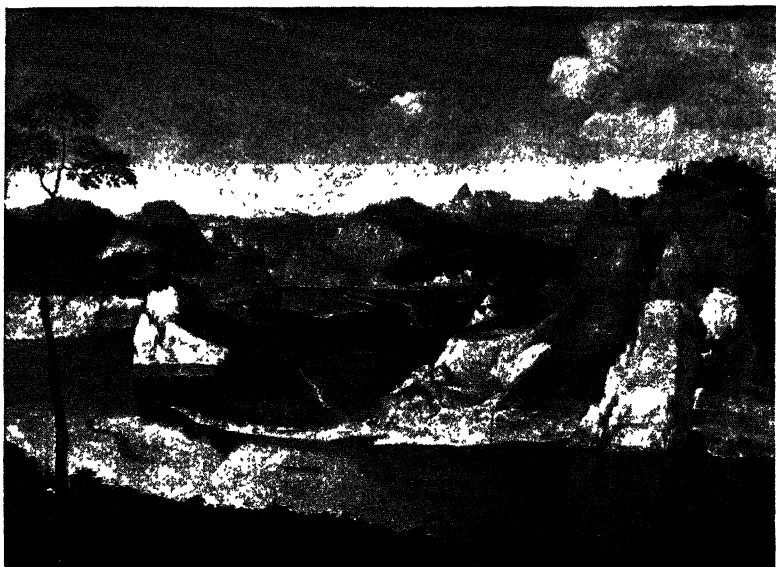
to his own personal taste, was succeeded by the picture dealer who wanted pictures which would please a circle of wealthy business clients. Painting thus became generalized instead of being individual, and cosmopolitan instead of being local. Yet this loss of the old raciness was not accompanied at first by any marked technical decline. The compounding of vehicles and colours was no longer experimental. It had become an exact science ; and surfaces were never more glassy nor individual tones more vivid than when, about the year 1500, the inspiration of the school was ebbing.

Its subject matter had always been limited to portraiture and to the making of small devotional pictures. The addition of landscape in the pleasant form which we associate with the name of PATINIR renders tolerable, and sometimes even charming, the art of a period which has little else to commend it. Patinir's immense popularity is attested by the crowd of pupils or close followers, who compel us even to-day to use his name as indicating a type of picture rather than a personal product. Of the works which are indubitably his we possess no example. They are composed in a rich key ; brave blues and whites in the distance, with fine greens, bottle-green and grass-green, in the mid-distance and foreground. His followers are more petty in design, harder in touch and more monotonous in colour, the greens in particular becoming heavy or brownish. Perhaps the very best of all these Patinir School pieces is the *River Scene* (1298), where the pale blues and whites have led some critics to suspect an Italian origin. But no Italian ever painted

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a river in a typical limestone valley, with kilns on the shore, and a long raft of timber floating serpent-like down stream. The picture, if it be not Patinir's, must come from some native of Patinir's country round Dinant on the Meuse.

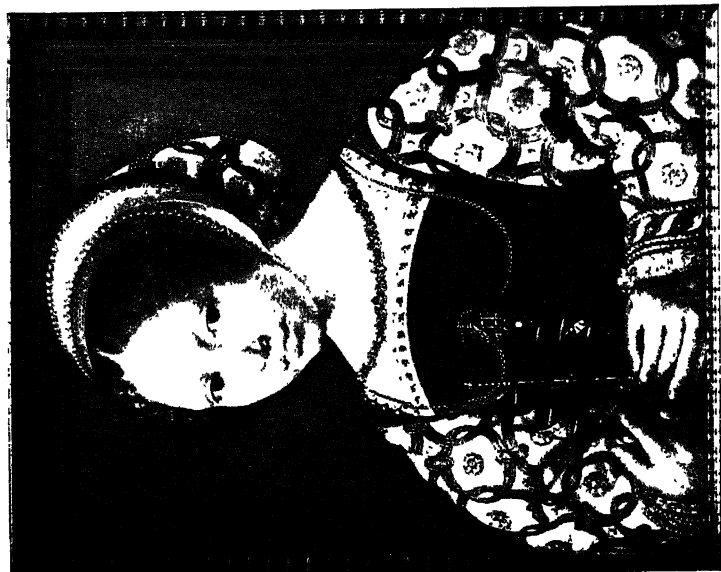
Among the cosmopolitan painters of the age Quinten MASSYS and John Gossaert called Mabuse are conspicuous. Massys in his early years had real refinement and insight, as the precious painting in tempera on linen, *Madonna with SS. Catharine and Barbara* (3664), will indicate. Here the feminine types exhibit a quite extraordinary tenderness and sensibility, comparable with that of the Sienese. But this delicate natural gift was soon overwhelmed, first by the desire of showing that he could equal the popular Antwerp painters in the richness and complexity of his compositions, and later by the search for classical repose and simplicity, of which our *Crucifixion* (715) is an example. It is thoroughly sound work, the sky is painted with real feeling and observation, and certain passages such as the blue of the Madonna's robe are masterly enough, but the impression left is cold and academic. Massys was an excellent and powerful portrait painter, but it was his refinement rather than his strength which attracted his contemporaries. We see the languid grace of his feminine type reflected everywhere about this time. So completely was it the prevailing fashion that it was adopted even by established artists like Gerard David, whose style and practice had for many years appeared to be settled beyond the possibility of change.



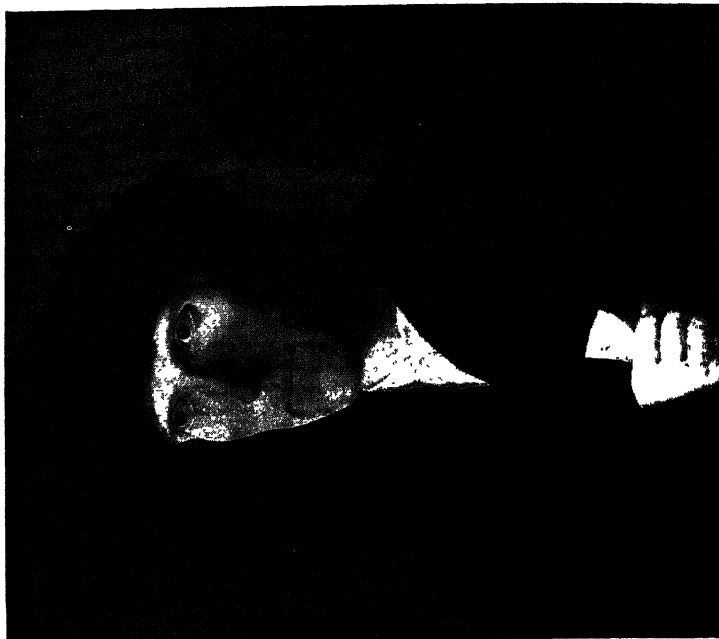
PATINIR SCHOOL : RIVER SCENE



QUINTEN MASSYS : MADONNA WITH SS. CATHERINE AND BARBARA



MABUSE : JACQUELINE DE BOURGOGNE



LUCAS VAN LEYDEN : PORTRAIT OF A MAN

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The *Holy Family* (2603), by the 'Master of the Death of the Virgin,' one of the lesser following of Massys, will serve as an example of the sort of religious painting which Antwerp was now producing; work inspired from so many different sources that its analysis provides the critic with perpetual exercise. It has little permanent interest for the painter. We see that the painting is clever, the colouring clear, cheerful and bright; but the thing is evidently a mechanical production, and it is not at all surprising to learn that the painter repeated this particular picture several times over. If, as seems almost certain, he was one Joos van Cleef, he is better remembered for his progeny than for his painting. His son was that unfortunate "Sotto" Cleef, who being brought to England by the great Sir Antonis Mor on the strength of the excellent portraits which he had painted, came to his end from disappointment at his lack of patronage.

MABUSE was a man of harder temper than Massys. His portraits have a metallic completeness which we might be tempted to call perfection if we did not know what others, from Van Eyck and Memling to Dürer and Holbein, had done with no less precision and with a far more penetrating eye for all that underlies the surface of the human countenance. We must therefore give a secondary place to such a fine piece of craftsmanship as the *Portrait of a Man* (656), and even to the *Jacqueline de Bourgogne* (2211), though this last comes near to catching the spirit of childhood which Velazquez and Van Dyck, Reynolds and Gainsborough, in later centuries were to interpret so delightfully.

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If Mabuse charms us with this little portrait he dominates the whole room with his *Adoration of the Kings* (No. 2790). The purchase of this important work from the Castle Howard collection possibly added more to the representative character of the National Gallery than to its aesthetic wealth. It is undeniably an accumulation rather than a composition ; it is too rich, too crowded, too complex, too minute and withal too cold, too indifferent in spirit. Our eyes have been trained to appreciate the restraint, the breadth, the economy of means and the intense sincerity of purpose which the great Italians of the time exhibit, so that all this elaborate technical display may seem so much misapplied energy. Yet to the rich merchants of Antwerp, this very opulence, this profusion, employed with so much real ingenuity, such unfailing dexterity of hand, such splendour of material, must have appeared as sheer genius. And when every deduction is made, there are certain passages of colour which still give us the true thrill of pleasure, and countless minutiae of representation which any painter must respect. And if, on further examination, we feel just a little surfeited with furs and silks and gold embroideries, but untouched by any of those deeper emotions which such a theme might be expected to evoke, we have one consolation. Since we possess this picture we are relieved from the necessity of acquiring any of the countless pictures of the same type and period, in which the defects of Mabuse are exaggerated and his merits are absent. [No little learning and patient research have been devoted to the separating and

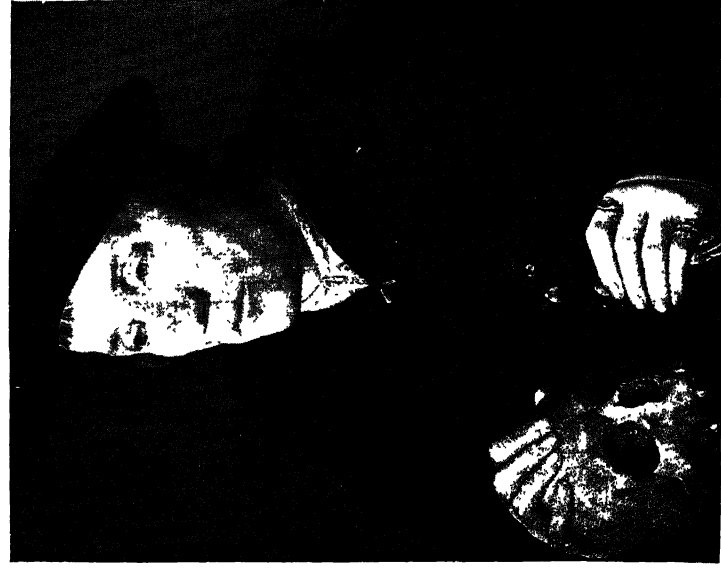


MABUSE  
ADORATION OF THE KINGS





MARINUS VAN REYMERSWAEI : THE USURERS



ANONYMOUS : PORTRAIT OF A MAN (1036)

## THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

identification of the authors of these derivative compositions, but even the fantastic elements which they introduce no longer appeal to most of us.

These elements came it would seem from Holland. The Dutch from the first were realists, and we have seen this realism strained to the verge of the ludicrous in the Triptych (No. 2922), by the "Master from Delft." When other Dutchmen of the time, in the effort to escape from this national failing, ape the airs and graces of more refined society, the result is tiresome and patently insincere. Hence it is only in portraiture that they achieve complete success. There is a grim genuineness about the *Portrait of a Man* (No. 3604) by Lucas Van LEYDEN which we shall not find in his imaginative compositions. Our little panel of *Lot and his Daughters* (3459) might be used as an illustration of this difference; while the anonymous *Portrait of a Man* (1036) will serve as further evidence of the perfection attained at this time by portraiture, even in the hands of men whose names have been forgotten. For quiet insight and complete technical accomplishment this little panel could hardly be bettered. Lucidel too could be a livelier artist than his embrowned *Young Lady* (184) would suggest.

Caricature provided a still more natural outlet for the spirit of the Low Countries. Inferiority of type, deformity, nay positive ugliness ceased in this field of art to be handicaps. So, while the painters of insincere spiritualities went on their commercial way, other painters side by side with them began to emphasize the grosser aspects of life in the Low Countries. *The*

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*Usurers* (No. 944), by Marinus van Reymerswael, is one of the best of many variants of a subject which had already become traditional. We may ask ourselves why this elaborate and brilliantly coloured picture, after attracting our attention, should fail to hold it. The answer would probably be, that it deals with types rather than individuals—with embodiments of one particular vice rather than with that fascinating mixture of good and evil which we term character. It is momentarily effective for the same reason that the ordinary melodrama or the ordinary detective story is effective, but like them it lacks the permanent appeal which good drama or good fiction can make, through the infinite variation which circumstance can produce from the complex soul of man. The finest things in literature, as in the graphic arts, are as it were three-dimensional.

From the painting of caricatures the step to the painting of *diableries* was easy and natural. In the remarkable art of Hieronymus Bosch, the mediaeval views of Heaven and Hell found a satirical illustrator of no little power. Once or twice in illustrating scenes of the Passion, Bosch attains to a real tragic grandeur : often he is grotesque and extravagant, but his fine colour, straightforward brushwork, and creative fancy make his genuine works invariably delightful. His imitators were numerous, and in Pieter BRUEGHEL he had a successor greater than himself. For many years Brueghel was known only as a draughtsman, and an engraver either of his own designs or of compositions by Bosch. But in the last few years of his life, he

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suddenly blossomed out as one of the most original and masterly painters of landscape and peasant life which the world has seen. These paintings are among the chief glories of the Vienna Gallery, and it is really impossible to appreciate Brueghel except by seeing them there. Outside that wonderful nucleus, only four or five collections possess genuine examples of Brueghel's work, and his outlook is so wide that more than one or two specimens are needed to represent him completely.

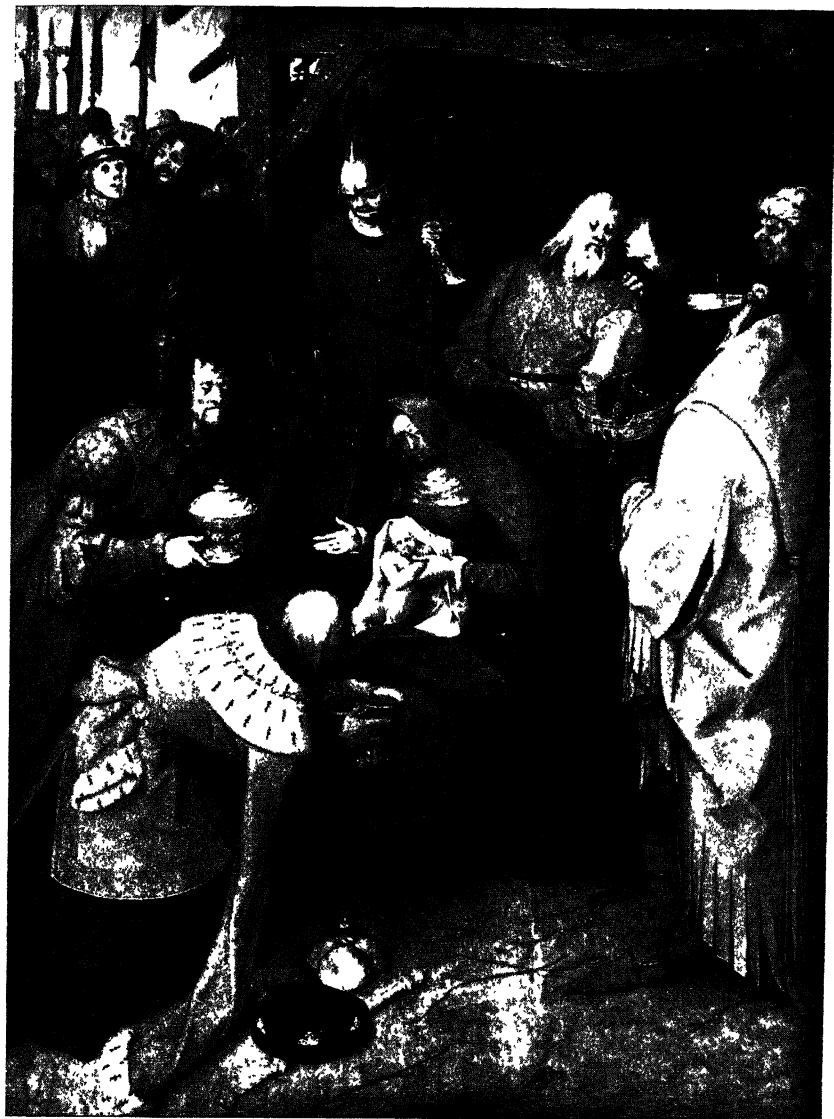
Our *Adoration of the Kings* (No. 3556), for example, shows none of his gifts for landscape painting, and illustrates him even as a satirist in a somewhat unusual mood. The explanation is to be found in the date, 1564. In that year the United Provinces of the Netherlands enjoyed a moment of fancied liberty. Layman and ecclesiastic alike breathed more freely in the belief that the heavy hand of Spain was withdrawn and that they had succeeded in obtaining religious freedom. Little did they foresee that in the following year the Duke of Alva was to come to them. Brueghel seems to have been deeply stirred by this temporary lifting of the weight which had crushed the national independence, for here he has taken the opportunity of satirizing the Three Kings as no one a year earlier or a year later would have dared to do. The kneeling monarch is an embodiment of decaying senility, the king who follows is as common and ugly as paint can make him. Balthasar is a simple woolly-headed blackamoor. Nor does the satire stop there: on all sides we may find hints of ambiguity, of a reaction

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not wholly unnatural from a religious observance too rigidly enforced.

But of the quality of the painting there can be no question. The largeness of the design is evident at a glance. The figure of the black king in particular is one of singular dignity, the broad simple mass of the pale yellow robe serving as an admirable foil to the figures crowding beyond. And the picture is full of the most admirable colour. Take, for example, the passage in the upper right-hand corner, with the head of the spectacled Jew who gazes so intently at the elaborate golden vessel which Balthasar carries, and see what delicate greys and purples, what black and white, what Giorgionesque russet and green and crimson Brueghel lavishes upon these quite subordinate heads. In the whole Flemish room you will not find more subtle and delightful harmonies.

The work is painted in the traditional Flemish manner, upon a transparent brown foundation into which the more positive colours are worked. But the handling differs altogether from that of the earlier painters in one important respect. They worked deliberately and carefully, either with the touch of men actually trained in miniature, as were the brothers Van Eyck, or at least with a similar minute scrupulosity. Brueghel breaks with this miniaturist tradition, and though he still continues to paint details, he handles them, like the larger masses of his picture, with swift and easy freedom. The earlier artists built up slowly towards a predetermined result. Brueghel improvises in the wet transparent paint, and so points the way



PIETER BRUEGHEL  
ADORATION OF THE KINGS



A MAN



SIR HENRY LEE

ANTONIS MOR

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to the still more rapid and fluent brushwork which the genius of Rubens was to perfect half a century later.

Brueghel indeed is the great connecting link between the early Netherlandish masters and the epoch of Rubens, Van Dyck and Jordaens. One portrait painter of the middle of the sixteenth century, may claim to share this eminence. The single head which we possess by Sir Antonis MOR (No. 1231), though characteristic both of the master's temper and his method of work, does not illustrate his grandeur of design, nor the grim dignity with which he was able to invest his sitters, mostly persons connected with Philip II. of Spain. They were a formidable group, and Mor does them no less justice than Velazquez was to administer in a later age to Philip IV. and his family. Lord Dillon's portrait of his ancestor Sir Henry Lee is perhaps the finest English example of Mor's work. In design and execution it is worthy of Holbein at his best, and with its clear-cut severity of contour it makes this fine Elizabethan courtier look a man whom it would be dangerous to displease. One or two of the best portraits of Coello, who was strongly influenced by Mor, reflect a similar firmness, and give the Spanish master a much higher place among portrait painters than his average output would justify. In Flanders Mor was naturally a powerful influence, under which Flemish portraiture, in the hands of men like Key and Pourbus, retained a respectable level to the beginning of the seventeenth century. Then Rubens came to gather up the shreds of landscape and figure design



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which he found, and to recast them, with some Italian alloy, in his own splendid mould. His achievements were so immense that with his great contemporaries Van Dyck and Jordaens he must be accorded a separate chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### RUBENS AND VAN DYCK

IN the middle of the sixteenth century Pieter Brueghel had shown that the traditional methods of Flemish painting might be used in a manner far more large and lively than that which his countrymen had hitherto favoured. But neither his example nor that of the great Italians, whom the Netherlanders assiduously studied, produced any real effect for some forty years after Brueghel's death. Flemish painting under Italian influence increased somewhat in scale, yet it never threw off the hardness of colour and contour inseparable from its mechanical surface finish. The defects of the Antwerp painters who followed Mabuse and Massys in the first decades of the century were propagated to the end of it by their successors. Then suddenly all this polished vacuity was overwhelmed by the genius of RUBENS and its immense repute, which compelled all the painters round him either to work in his style or to be hopelessly *démodé*.

In early manhood Rubens spent some nine years in Italy and Spain, where, by incessant artistic activity and no less incessant study, he perfected the development

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of a temper which was naturally most vigorous and fertile. Retaining all the while his Flemish technical method, he grafted on to that stock all that the example of the great Italians of the sixteenth century could teach him. The huge anatomies of Michelangelo, the glowing tones of Titian, the cooler decorative schemes of Veronese, with their audaciously posed figures and their trappings of clouds or flying draperies,—even the rigorous and noble classicism of Mantegna—all played their part in the composite style which Rubens evolved. Had he done no more than borrow from these classic sources he would have become a mere eclectic like so many of his countrymen. But he had natural predilections of his own which he never sacrificed, and these were so strong that when we think of Rubens we hardly remember for a moment the various sources from which his imagery may have been drawn, but see only his personal characteristics, his amazing vigour of design and brushwork, the pearly or golden tones which give refinement to his colour, and above all his power of painting the living human figure, not as a coloured statue but as a solid massive thing of real flesh and bone, ample in girth and of limb, and almost always of the florid type which we associate with Flanders.

The age in which he lived was one in which prince vied with prince in splendour, so that when once the exceptional power of Rubens was recognized there was a great and ever increasing demand for those vast decorations which he alone could produce, and which, with their opulent colour and inexhaustible fancy, did honour even to the most magnificent palaces. It soon

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became impossible for Rubens to supply this demand, without depending very largely upon the help of assistants. Immense as his energies were, he had usually to leave the more mechanical parts of his painting to others, merely supplying the design and retouching with his own hand the finished studio product. He numbered among his pupils not only the great Van Dyck, but in time practically every artist of ability who was working in the Antwerp neighbourhood. So the quality of his studio work is often admirable, and even those who have studied Rubens carefully may hesitate now and then to distinguish which passages are actually by the master's hand and which are by some capable assistant.

Fortunately the group of Rubens' paintings in the National Gallery is almost wholly free from suspicion of studio help. Unlike most collections of the master's work the pictures are all of moderate size, and were painted entirely by his own hand at the period when his powers were at their ripest. What those powers amounted to we can judge from *The Triumph of Silenus* (853), a famous work which once belonged to Richelieu. The tremendous mass of sun-warmed flesh colour, relieved by tones of pale blue and lilac grey, catches the eye first, and indicates by its breadth and vigour that a new force has here come into painting. But when this first impression passes and we begin to look at details, we find we have not only to do with a great colourist but also with a consummate draughtsman. The head of the faun to the left of Silenus, for instance, is a perfect example of what is implied by the term

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‘drawing with the brush.’ Not only is the modelling everywhere superb, but it is all built up with crisp lively strokes of the brush, as scientifically planned in their direction and sequence as the most austere academic could desire, yet at the same time so swift, so fluent, and so charged with rich colour as to give the work an incredible vivacity. The painting of the faun’s beard in particular might be taken as a specimen of the power of Rubens as an executant, and remembered as a kind of touchstone for distinguishing between master and follower.

In the *Rape of the Sabines* (38), we may study Rubens at the very summit of his career, when his genius as a designer and a colourist was perfected by experience. The turbulent effect of many figures in violent action is modified primarily by the large massing of the groups. The great diamond-shaped light within the rectangle of the picture space gives breadth and simplicity to the general effect. This unity is enhanced by the effect of atmosphere in which the whole scene is enveloped. The uprights of the columns and the level flakes of cloud behind them provide an element of repose: they also are tinged with such delicate and lovely colour as even Rubens did not often produce. These tones of pale blue and golden white, with the pale reds of the architecture, are the foundation of the colour scheme on which the whole picture is based. Pearly white and gold, this last concentrated in the yellow satin underdress of the plump lady in the centre of the foreground, occur all through the picture. The pale red becomes a rosy red in the middle distance and a glowing red in

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the foreground. The blue seems to be split up, and becomes in the middle distance olive green, or lilac grey : the former turning in the foreground to a fuller green, the latter to the richest possible black. Indeed this avoidance of strong blues is characteristic of Rubens in his later years. In his early works, when most directly influenced by the Venetians, he is fond of contrasting the most vivid masses of vermilion and ultramarine. With increasing experience, steely grey, deep purple or deep green take the place of the ultramarine, and vinous or rosy reds supplant vermilion. The *Judgment of Paris* (194) will serve as an additional illustration of this tendency.

While Rubens was recommended to the great patrons of the day by the profusion of his imagery and the glow of his colouring, his technical methods naturally attracted the attention of his fellow artists. His intercourse with Velazquez at Madrid did much to enliven the Spaniard's somewhat sombre tonality. His influence upon France was more lasting. Through Coypel he became the presiding genius of French historical painting in the first half of the eighteenth century ; Watteau, artistically speaking, is his direct descendant. So potent was his example, that, nearly two centuries after his death the great English landscape painters, Turner, Constable and Crome, were all decisively affected by it, as we shall see.

The Flemish method of work which Rubens developed so magnificently, was in its essence the spreading of thin transparent or translucent colour over a white ground. This ground shining through the super-

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imposed films of pigment gave them that luminosity, that rich inward fire, to which the great masters of the Netherlands owe much of their charm. Rubens was careful to retain this transparency. He sketched in his pictures in thin tones of warm golden brown, often working his colours into this pleasant preparation with separate strokes of the brush, so that the tints retained the utmost vivacity. When we recall the smooth solid tones of his contemporaries, we may realize what a revolutionary Rubens must have seemed in his own time. His method is one of almost continuous drawing with the brush, a practice which his extraordinary skill and creative power enabled him to do with unequalled speed and fluency and finality, so that the transparency of the shadows was not chilled or dulled by the intrusion of opaque colour. Rubens reserved opaque colour for the high lights. There he was not afraid of using a forcible impasto, made all the more remarkable by its contrast with the thin pigment of the half tones and shadows. The peculiar richness of quality he obtained by the use of thin painting over a warm foundation is excellently illustrated by the black satin dress of the buxom lady in the centre foreground of *The Rape of the Sabines*. Next to her comes a lady in a dress of golden yellow. This golden yellow seems to have been laid as a foundation for the black dress, and the black paint swept thinly over it acquires thereby a peculiar richness which could have been attained in no other way. The essential features of the style can all be excellently studied in *The Apotheosis of William the Silent* (187). The imagery of the sketch verges



RUBENS : RAPE OF THE SABINES





RUBENS

AUTUMN, THE CHÂTEAU DE STEEN



RUBENS

LANDSCAPE—SUNSET

## RUBENS AND VAN DYCK

upon the ludicrous, for the hero borne aloft sprawling and kicking in cuirass and jack-boots is patently undivine. But its quality is delightful. From beginning to end it is brush-drawing of the finest: dainty and vaporous in tone, pearly and opalescent in colour, and yet for all its slightness, robust almost to excess.

And we may note too that by this lightness of handling, this swiftness of notation, as well as by the simplicity of the pigments employed, the work of Rubens attains always a certain unity of substance and of rhythm. These knit his most elaborate combinations together into a single coherent whole, which we recognize at once, as we recognize the handwriting of a friend. Rubens was careful never to let this calligraphic quality in his work degenerate into mere dexterous flourishings of the brush. No artist was ever a more earnest and hard-working student; few have left so fine a record of drawings made from nature.

On the comparatively few occasions on which he turned his attention to landscape, Rubens showed no less power and originality. Pieter Brueghel the Elder had shown half a century earlier that landscape might be invested with epic grandeur, and yet retain that intimate character so dear to the Northern mind. Rubens came nearer still to nature. In our *Autumn, the Château de Steen* (66), he has painted his own country house, with meadows and pollards stretching westward in front of it, under such a breezy golden afternoon sky as had not hitherto appeared in art. It is perhaps his masterpiece in this field, and is specially interesting to Englishmen from its influence upon our

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native landscape painters. It was lent to the British Institution in 1815 by its generous owner, Sir George Beaumont, who presented it eleven years later to the infant National Gallery. The effect was immediate. The sombre gloom of Turner's early style was dispelled by its radiant breadth; *Walton Bridges*, formerly in the Wantage Collection, was the first of a series of great creations in which golden sunshine and wide stretches of country are the dominant motives. Constable immediately started upon a series of large compositions, of which our *Haywain* (1207) is a characteristic specimen, all of them filled with a new sense of movement and freedom of brushwork; indeed to the very end of Constable's life his larger pictures are always executed in what is only a modification of the Rubens technique. Nor can it be a mere coincidence that Crome's *Mousehold Heath* (689), as vast, and airy and spacious as any landscape well could be, came into being in 1816. Can any other single picture claim so distinguished a progeny? Our *Landscape Sunset* (157), though much smaller and less famous than the *Château de Steen*, is in quality not inferior. Indeed there exists no more complete and moving record of those afternoons in late autumn when the sun blazes through the nearly leafless trees across fields still wet with the rain—when the sky is glorious with blue and drifting gold for some wonderful half hour before the twilight comes on and the chill in the air warns us that winter is at hand. This memory of some notable walk in the country has a reality and an intimacy which we do not always find in the painter's more ambitious

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designs. Some reflection of this intimate feeling for the country and for country life may be found in the work of a younger Antwerp painter, Jan Siberechts, coupled, as in *The Water Lane* (2130), with a sharpness of colour and a brightness of tone which give the picture a curiously modern look.

In his allegorical pictures, Rubens is most truly himself. There he was free to alter or adapt just as he pleased to suit the needs of his design. The more restricted art of portraiture he practised only now and then as the fancy took him, or as some very great patron required. In our *Archduke Albert* (3818) we see him in his early years, stiff, harsh and uncompromising, already audacious in the use of the bright red background, but otherwise careful and quite uninspired. His well-known portrait of his sister-in-law, *Susanne Fourment* (852), shows a similar audacity in the choice of a scheme of illumination which is full of technical difficulties, but these difficulties are overcome by the skill of one who is now a mature and most accomplished artist. The *plein air* treatment, with the face seen by reflected sunlight, the cool shimmering flesh tones, must have seemed as revolutionary in their day as did the first Impressionist canvases. Last in date comes the admirable head of *Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel* (2968), the famous collector and agent of Charles I. Even Van Dyck, so apt at subtly flattering his sitters, cannot make this great art patron into a really imposing figure. He does his best, but the result is a dignified abstraction with little personality behind it. Rubens shows us quite frankly what Arundel

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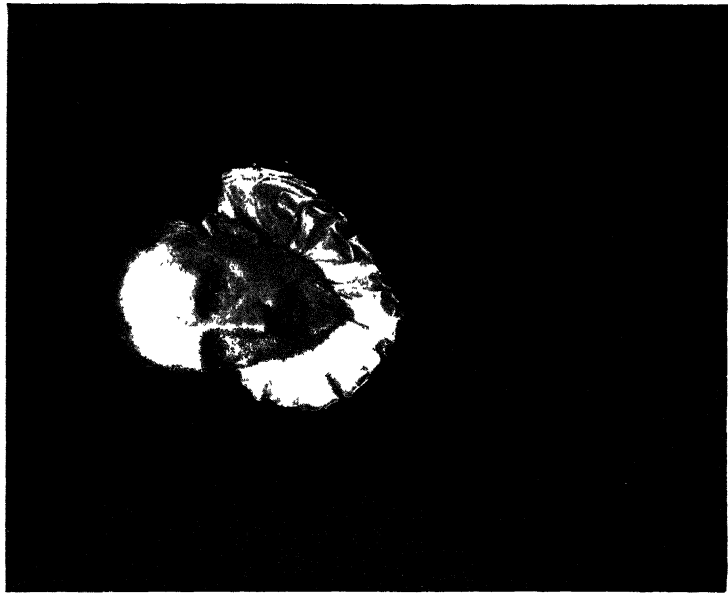
really was, a shrewd man of business, and no doubt the best possible agent for picture buying that a king could have. Indeed you might find his like to-day, not among princes but among cosmopolitan financiers, with a house full of 'antiques,' which he has picked up on his devious way through the world.

Among the many painters whom Rubens gathered round him in his Antwerp studio was a young man of nineteen, Anthony Van DYCK, who had already acquired a certain repute in portraiture. After some two years' practice under Rubens as the most famous and skilful of his assistants, this brilliant young man was introduced to the English Court through the Earl of Arundel. No opening worthy of his ambition presented itself; so Van Dyck spent seven busy years from 1621 to 1628 in Italy, painting portraits and studying the great Italians. To Titian he gave particular attention. In 1632, four years after his return to Antwerp, he was invited by Charles I. to London, where, with one or two comparatively brief intervals, he remained till his death in 1641.

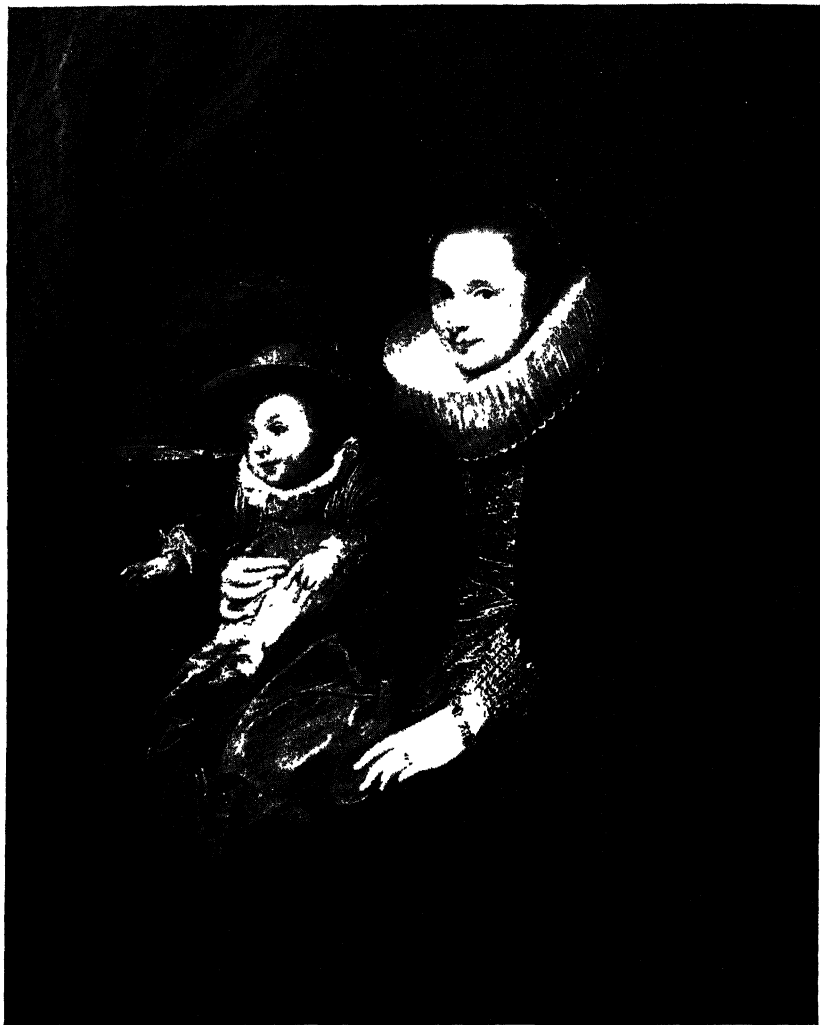
Into this short life Van Dyck crowded such an enormous mass of work, that the stages of his artistic growth cannot be understood without these biographical details. Our collection of his painting at Trafalgar Square, though by no means so large as the work he executed in England might warrant, is sufficient to illustrate the various phases of his art tolerably well. The composition of *The Emperor Theodosius and S. Ambrose* (50), a copy with variations of a large picture by Rubens, will indicate how nearly the young Van



RUBENS : THOMAS HOWARD, EARL OF ARUNDEL



VAN DYCK : CORNELIS VAN DER GEEST



VAN DYCK  
LADY AND CHILD

## RUBENS AND VAN DYCK

Dyck could approach his master. In point of manual and technical skill there is curiously little to choose between the two, although Rubens was the greatest executant of his day, and indeed one of the most gifted technicians who ever held a paint brush. The work of Van Dyck is however already a little different, notably in the treatment of the shadows, which are more solid and cooler in tone than those of Rubens. Also we may note that the heads in the picture all look like portraits; in Rubens the individual always tends to be merged into the type. And the portraits themselves have a certain temperamental or intellectual cast, whereas in Rubens the tendency is usually towards the robust animal. The *Portrait of an Artist* (49) will illustrate these differences, even more forcibly than the *Emperor Theodosius and S. Ambrose*; Van Dyck's silvery tone in particular being conspicuous in spite of the damage which the picture has suffered.

With these two youthful works may be grouped the *Cornelius Van der Geest* (52), a finely modelled portrait which ever since the foundation of the Gallery has enjoyed an immense and well merited popularity with the students. So powerful indeed is the relief of the head and the white ruff, that hypercriticism might accuse the portrait of being just a little theatrical, were it not for the gravity of temper which it displays. This gravity, this dignity, coupled with a certain sensitiveness, an instinctive refining of the features, are characteristics of Van Dyck. Through them he became the first of Court painters, and it is perhaps only the democratic tendency of our age which causes



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us to value them rather less than three previous centuries have done. As I have dealt with this question elsewhere<sup>1</sup> it is unnecessary to discuss it again, but it may be noticed that the general air of good breeding with which Van Dyck invested his sitters cannot fairly be regarded as a bad thing in itself. Had he neglected their character, and substituted for it some mere *simulacrum* of courtly manners, as the common society painter is wont to do, we might relegate him for all his skill to some place in their aesthetic Limbo. But his personages have not only the air of greatness, but also its soul and its intelligence. These qualities cannot be rendered without real insight, and in virtue of that insight we must allow Van Dyck his place among the world's finest portrait painters.

The *Lady and Child* (3011) illustrates Van Dyck's style at the beginning of his visit to Italy, and incidentally his sympathy with children, who in the seventeenth century began to attain something like their later importance in the arts. The plump, merry, wriggling child in this picture anticipates some of the happiest creations of Reynolds. It is interesting to note that the opposite aspect of the life of the very young, its frailty and pathetic loneliness, was being recorded about the same time by Velazquez. Gainsborough now and then shows a similar insight. But since children are generally painted to gratify an honest parental pride, it is natural that the cheerful, healthy, animal side of their existence should be the popular one.

<sup>1</sup> *Notes on the Art of Rembrandt*, chapter viii.

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The *Marchese Cattaneo* (2127), though a fine piece of painting and of subtle insolent characterization, represents the culmination of his 'Genoese period' less adequately than the famous *Balbi Children*, a generous loan to the Gallery by Lady Lucas. Here under Italian influence Van Dyck's paint has become more close and solid in texture, with some loss of luminosity; but the colour has grown more frank and vivid, while the design has a stately dignity comparable to that of the great Venetians. To Titian's influence in particular we must refer the breadth and glow of colour which animate Van Dyck's later pictures. On returning from Italy he spent some years in Antwerp, and then came to England to paint for Charles I.

It is the fashion to speak of Van Dyck's work in England as showing the declension of his power, and to exalt his Genoese portraits at the expense of those which he painted in London. That the best of his Genoese pictures are masterpieces we need not deny, any more than we can deny that much of the English work bearing Van Dyck's name is dull, stiff or slipshod. The truth is that, like his master Rubens, Van Dyck could not with all his application keep pace with his commissions. He had to employ studio assistants, not all of them first-rate craftsmen, to produce replicas. He had even, when the commission was not one which he valued, to leave to others large portions of what would ultimately have to pass for his own work. So the name of 'Van Dyck' in England may sometimes be applied to pictures on which the master laid few or no touches with his own hand. But where he was

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painting for the king, or for his special friends at Court, the work from first to last is his own and is in its way incomparable.

Our *Charles I. on Horseback* (1172) belongs to the great group of portraits of the king and his family, of which the nucleus still remains at Windsor and represents the painter's supreme achievement. It is a thousand pities that our picture has to be seen under glass, for its general tone is somewhat low, and reflections prevent us from seeing its beauties as clearly as they merit. If the idea of the design is borrowed from Van Dyck's favourite model Titian, he has made it his own by inspiring it with his own temper. Titian's *Charles V. at Madrid* is grand with a certain tragic grandeur. The pallid emperor in armour gallops, lance in hand, out of a wood. The whole atmosphere of the place is spectral and menacing. The English monarch advances bareheaded, the stately pace of his magnificent charger accentuating the rider's dignity and calm. The horse it should be noted is not only superbly conceived and drawn, but coloured with a beauty and delicacy which no other master, not Titian, not Velazquez, not Rubens even, has equalled. Of the king's portrait it is needless to speak. The Philip IV. of Velazquez is not more famous than Van Dyck's Charles I. But the landscape and sky in this picture call for more special notice.

Van Dyck, as his rare landscape drawings indicate, has a natural genius for landscape no less remarkable than that of Rubens, though entirely different. Rubens summed up in his princely way the glow and glory of



VAN DYCK : CHARLES I. (DETAIL)



VAN DYCK  
GEORGE AND FRANCIS VILLIERS

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autumnal sunshine spreading over Flemish pastures and woodlands. Van Dyck had a more intimate feeling for the character and growth of trees, and for the cool air and light of the English country side, which he saw as no other painter saw it till John Constable came to revolutionize landscape painting. A water-colour sketch by Van Dyck in the British Museum seems actually to belong to the nineteenth century, so wholly does it anticipate our modern vision. But Van Dyck was armed also with all that tradition and study could teach him about the science of painting. We need not wonder then that the blue-grey sky and the white clouds that drift across it in our *Charles I.* should be so superbly rendered, or that the great flakes of foliage behind and above the king's figure should be so grand in form, and painted with such richness and subtlety of hue. The smaller tree to the left, with the distance and sky beyond it, is another notable passage. For one moment we see 'the grand style' in alliance and harmony with nature.

The *George and Francis Villiers* (3605) presents another aspect of Van Dyck's genius. All his pictures were primarily designed in light and shade, and he knew as well as his master Rubens the value of solid sculpturesque modelling, as a means of rendering form and making it convincing to the eye. Pictures like the *Cornelius van der Geest*, his numerous paintings in monochrome, and his supremely brilliant etchings are testimony to Van Dyck's eye for substance. But his study of Titian had filled him with a passion for broad masses of colour, duly opposed and harmonized, and

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the colourist's passion cannot easily be satisfied without some sacrifice of chiaroscuro. In his last years Van Dyck set himself to reconcile these irreconcilables, and his English period is notable for the splendid colour which he adds to his previous technical acquisitions. Of this colour our *George and Francis Villiers* is one of the most triumphant examples. The painting is a marvel of swiftness and science, the design is a noble creation, carried out with the utmost solidity and force of relief, yet with these qualities are combined such great chords of deep red and gold and white and radiant blue that in decorative power it has perhaps no superior in the National Gallery. Nor are these qualities gained at the expense of characterization. The hand of George Villiers is no less eloquent of his subsequent notoriety than is the head and pose of his brother, 'the beautiful Francis Villiers,' who, a few years later, was to die in battle with his back against a tree.

Those who are curious in such things will notice that Van Dyck's heads in this his final manner, though more summary in brushwork than those of Velazquez, and pitched in a key which has perhaps rather more of science than of natural observation in it, are painted on the same system as the Spaniard's. Both model the head largely and rather softly, and then give life and relief by a few very crisp touches. With Van Dyck these are generally done in a rich brown, so liquid as to look like touches of watercolour made with a small but fully charged sable brush, a practice which is often a ready means of distinguishing the master's work from that of his assistants.

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It would be unjust to Van Dyck to pass over his religious and 'historical' compositions without some brief notice. We may admit at once that he did not possess the immense natural creativeness of Rubens. But as Van Dyck in technical matters, by extraordinary powers of assimilation, by excellent judgment and taste, and by sureness of hand and eye has made for himself a place with the greatest, so a few of his imaginative compositions rise so far above the common level that they must be acclaimed as masterpieces. It is true that many of his large religious paintings have something florid or affected about them. This leaves an impression of insincerity upon the spectator, and has done harm to the painter's latter-day repute. But no such accusation can be brought against the *Christ crowned with Thorns*, or the *Kiss of Judas* in the Prado. The former might never have been painted but for Titian, the methods of the latter are those of Rubens; but there is no denying the tremendous power of the one, nor the other's profound dramatic significance. The contrast between the burly ruffian Judas and the noble dignity of Christ is no mere able use of conventional types, but a true and convincing creation.<sup>1</sup> In the *S. Martin* at Windsor we see Van Dyck challenging Rubens with success, and there is evidence in other pictures that had he lived to realize his ambitions and embark upon decorative painting on a large scale, we should have had from him works which, if they contained no very great or novel imaginative inspiration,

<sup>1</sup> The Cook Collection at Richmond contains a smaller version of this magnificent design.



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would at least have combined exceptional vigour and physical charm with the richest and most brilliant colour. For Van Dyck was only forty-two when he died, and his art was increasing steadily in breadth and splendour up to the end.

It is customary to regard him as more luxurious, courtly and superficial than a great artist ought to be. Yet his habits of life did not prevent his average output of fine painting from being far larger than that of any other European artist, with the possible exception of his master Rubens. His courtliness never led him to do less than justice to a fine subject, and frequently helped him to make a great picture out of a commonplace sitter. As for superficiality, the charge is ridiculous in the case of one whose science was so complete, one whose sense of human dignity and human beauty was so acute. Indeed if he does fall short, he does so from the very superabundance of his gifts. His way of living was princely ; to support it he laboured with a speed which his immense technical experience, his certainty of hand, and his unerring eye encouraged. That speed in its turn led him to make up for indifference, when a subject did not interest him deeply, by pictorial eloquence. This rhetorical element in his art is what we remember to his disadvantage when we compare him with artists whose genius, like that of his contemporary Velazquez, is more sober, and has grown up slowly out of a succession of hesitations and experiments. For Van Dyck in youth was a spoiled child of fortune. He was able to perfect his natural gifts under the eye of the greatest painter of his

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time. So he obtained, almost in boyhood, a complete mastery of his materials which left him little to strive against, and thereby deprived him of the artist's best monitor—Difficulty.

JORDAENS is the one other artist of the Rubens circle who has preserved a distinct and considerable reputation. Though he was evidently much influenced by the style of work, the force of colour and the vigorous handling which we associate with Rubens, Jordaens, going his own way, achieved success in a province which Van Dyck would have considered beneath his dignity. His world is that of the well-to-do Flemish middle-class, a world cheerful and full-blooded, fond of the intimacies of family life, and no less fond, like their modern successors, of the pleasures of the table. Their Gargantuan festivals provide Jordaens with his most characteristic subjects. He is no less successful with his family groups, of which our *Holy Family* (3215) is a thinly disguised example. For the Madonna is the painter's wife, and one of his little daughters is the model for the Infant Saviour. The head of the mother in its gentleness and solidity anticipates Reynolds: the Child too is admirable.<sup>1</sup> The painting is rich and massive, the colour broad and harmonious, but the plebeian S. John and the most unattractive lamb show that we are not in the presence of a craftsman of the same rank as Rubens or Van Dyck. Indeed the robust excellence of Jordaens is so often marred by passages which are coarse or clumsy that he is seldom com-

<sup>1</sup> The idea is apparently borrowed from a painting by Rubens in the Rijksmuseum.

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pletely satisfying. Yet now and then he comes near to greatness, and once at least actually achieves it. The picture of his own family in the Prado at Madrid, even in that assemblage of masterpieces, is conspicuous and triumphant. It is dignified in plan, most brilliant and vigorous in colour, most happy in characterization, while one figure, that of a maid servant, half-shadowed by the trees, is a *tour de force*, similar to the *Nelly O'Brien* of Reynolds at Hertford House. In general perhaps it needs some touch of the Flemish temper to be in complete sympathy with Jordaens, for all his solid workmanship, his admirable colour and his pleasant earthy humour. With him we may take leave of seventeenth century Flanders, for artists like Brouwer and Teniers can be more conveniently discussed in connexion with their Dutch contemporaries.

## CHAPTER V

## DUTCH PORTRAITS

IN the introduction to this volume I have attempted to show why the art of the seventeenth century has a very practical importance for us. In it for the first time we see painting deliberately done to suit the requirements of the ordinary well-to-do man, instead of being monopolized by the courts of princes, by ecclesiastical or municipal corporations, or by some exceptionally rich merchant. Pictures now become a part of any well appointed house ; they begin to take a place in everyday life and to be intimate personal possessions. As such, they become portable, things of moderate size, and are no longer restricted to subjects which would serve to edify or to impress the general public. To satisfy the individual requirements of a private patron rather than to gain the approbation of the community, was now the painter's business. Since these requirements rapidly grew to be both numerous and various the painter was compelled to specialize on some particular branch or branches of his craft. So portraiture, landscape, conversation-pieces, architecture, and 'still life' came to have their separate

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practitioners, few of whom made more than occasional excursions into fields other than that in which they gained their repute.

Holland had not been without her share of painters during the fifteenth and sixteenth century, but the greater part of their artistic output consisted of altar-pieces and devotional pictures which were destroyed by the iconoclasts during the early part of the long struggle with Spain. That destruction was so complete that Dutch art of the sixteenth century comes into existence as if it were a new thing with no long ancestry behind it. But the moment that the grip of Spain began to slacken, and the sea-borne trade of the country began to prosper, the revival started. The early decades of the seventeenth century found the country reasonably free, tolerably rich, and full of painters and painters' guilds.

By this time the thriving Hollander had provided himself with a country house, where he might take his ease surrounded by his farms and his gardens. As we have seen, this step was of enormous importance to the arts, in that the grim climatic conditions of the North compelled every country house to be, as it were, a self-contained fortress against wintry weather and the confinement thereby entailed. So the perfect home came to be fitted with every form of diversion which money and ingenuity could provide in the shape of books and pictures and music. And as was natural the owner's tastes were reflected in these possessions. His pictures could remind him of his family, of his friends, and of their amusements ; of his poultry and

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his flowers, his garden, his farms, his cattle and his sports ; of the pleasant Dutch country and sea-shore, and of picturesque corners in its famous cities. And for the man who prided himself upon a cosmopolitan outlook there were views of Italy and pictures in the Italian style, just as to-day many collectors must have views of France and pictures in the French style.

And since the Dutchman, with all his good taste, was a matter-of-fact person, he desired that these presentments of the life round him should be as like the real thing as the painter's craft could make them, with a preference, for the winter was long and dismal, that their general effect should be bright and cheerful. Hence it is that so many of the best Dutch pictures seem to aim at the effect of a window opening upon a sunny landscape, or upon some other room where we may enjoy the doings of a group of pleasant strangers. The national habits of tidiness and cleanliness (at least on the surface), imposed a further condition on the painter—namely that his work should be scrupulously neat, executed with crisp touches and clear fresh pigment in a sound and workmanlike style.

In the best examples of Dutch painting these conditions were so well fulfilled that the pictures have retained their vividness unimpaired to the present day. When their surface quality and substance have been damaged either by time or ill-treatment, the loss in aesthetic charm is out of all proportion to the extent of the injury. An Italian fresco or tempera painting may continue to stimulate and interest us by its design and colour even though the pristine surface has been

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injured irreparably. But with a Dutch painting fine condition is essential to full enjoyment ; and in this respect we are singularly fortunate. Sir Robert Peel formed his collection, and it was the nucleus of ours, with special reference to the perfect state of his purchases, and the great majority of the subsequent additions reach an equally high standard.

The painters of the Dutch School are very numerous and nearly one hundred and fifty of them are represented at Trafalgar Square. But of these only some thirty or forty are considerable personages. The remainder with all their skill are men of quite secondary importance, painters of sound 'furniture pictures,' but not possessing any special creative or technical power which warrants detailed study. If we recall the ideal of the open window for a moment, we shall see that, for the most part, the men who best deserve consideration are those who have come nearest to fulfilling that ideal, while the secondary figures are by comparison dull in colour and heavy in tone. The most conspicuous exception is Rembrandt, but that extraordinary figure is so unlike the rest of his countrymen in many ways that he must be discussed by himself. The remaining artists of the school can be classified most conveniently by their subject matter, under such headings as portraiture, conversation-pieces and landscape.

Dutch portraiture is first employed at the beginning of the seventeenth century to commemorate the heroes of the struggle with Spain. Ravesteijn and MIEREVELT are the two names most prominent in

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this connexion, but the former is not represented in the Gallery at all, and the latter only by a single work, the *Portrait of a Lady* (2292). Attractive, substantial and thoroughly well done, though without any startling originality, the portrait is a typical piece of Dutch work. It is however less completely typical of Mierevelt than the *Lord Vere of Tilbury* (No. 818) in the National Portrait Gallery, a sound, serious and admirable piece of work, with a quaint little campaigning scene introduced below the portrait proper. The interesting and well coloured portrait of *Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia* (71), in the same Gallery, shows the painter in a stiffer and more primitive manner; but the variations in style in Mierevelt's portraits are so considerable as to suggest that, like his contemporary Rubens, his success compelled him to keep a large studio in which the work which he himself was too busy to do was entrusted to assistants.

Mierevelt is not however an artist who is likely to attract the painter of to-day. His sobriety of temper, his sound methodical craftsmanship will exemplify the general attitude of the Dutch painters towards their work, but lack the individual note and the vitality which we expect from a great portrait painter. Neither of these qualities however was wanting in the next artist whom we have to consider, Frans HALS. We know very little about his youth or his training, and nothing about his early work. When Hals makes his first public appearance he is a grown man and a complete master of his art. For a time he was prosperous. Later fashion deserted him; he died a pauper, and for



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nearly two hundred years was completely forgotten. He was not represented at Trafalgar Square till 1876, and then his *Portrait of a Woman* (1021) cost no more than one hundred guineas, less than one-fiftieth of its present market value.

This neglect is the more surprising because Hals was one of the most remarkable craftsmen who ever handled a brush. It would have been much less surprising had he been without custom among his own countrymen. His style of work is the antithesis of that which his fellows admired and practised, and it says much for their judgment that he was not condemned as a dangerous artistic revolutionary. The ordinary Dutch painter gradually built up the head of his sitter on the canvas by a series of slow processes, starting with a foundation of transparent brown monochrome to which colour and details were gradually added. Hals was perhaps the first painter to appreciate the charm of the oil-sketch, to feel the freshness, the crispness, the vitality of pigment applied swiftly and decisively and then left undisturbed. So he set himself to master the art of doing at a single operation what his fellows did by a succession of processes—to lay in half-tones and lights and shadows so accurate both in shape and value that no second painting would be needed. Then the portrait would have the vigour and vitality of clean direct painting, and be just as complete as work done in the conventional way.

It might even have a positive advantage. The leisurely methodical construction of a head on a monochrome foundation, in the hands of all but the

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most gifted executants, is bound to result in a static or even stolid appearance. Rapid painting done from life will, if accurate, be sure to possess some added vitality in virtue of the liveliness of the brush strokes, and this vitality born of technical swiftness is so typical of Hals, that we might think he was exploiting or exaggerating it, were it not that he has left us a sufficiency of grave and dignified works, to redeem him from the charge of being showy, superficial, or mannered.

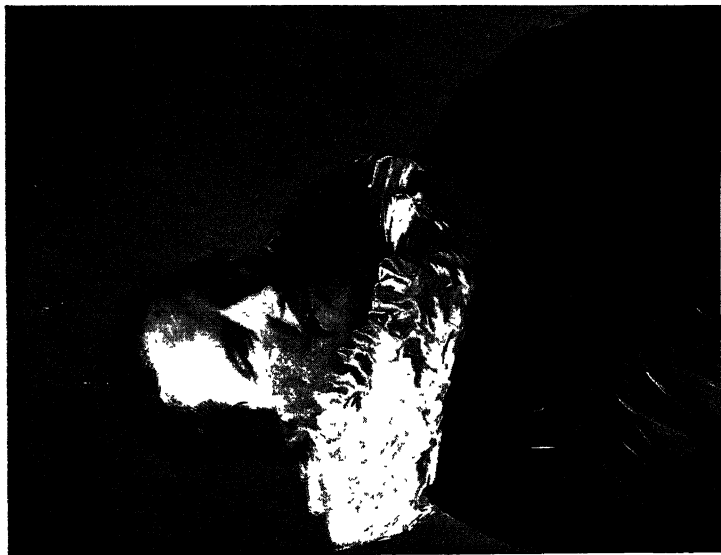
If one of the most brilliant of executants, Hals is also one of the most narrow of artists, restricting himself almost entirely to single figures, and those seldom more than half-lengths. Haarlem has a monopoly of his fine work on a larger scale, for nothing by him exists elsewhere to rival the great 'Archer' groups which he painted for that city. Indeed, composition did not come to him easily, as our big *Family Group* (2285) will indicate. It is a heavy uncomfortable design, and the discomfort seems to have affected even the sitters for, with the exception of the nursemaid, they are clumsy, ill-constructed, and have no sort of interest in or connexion with each other. I have once or twice seen works by Hals in private collections which were still more loose and slipshod in construction, but none I think which was quite so heavy and uninspired.

Fortunately our four single portraits illustrate Hals more favourably. Our *Portrait of a Man* (1251) is possibly the earliest in date, yet it is signed and dated 1633, when the artist, if we accept the common tradition of the date of his birth, must have been about

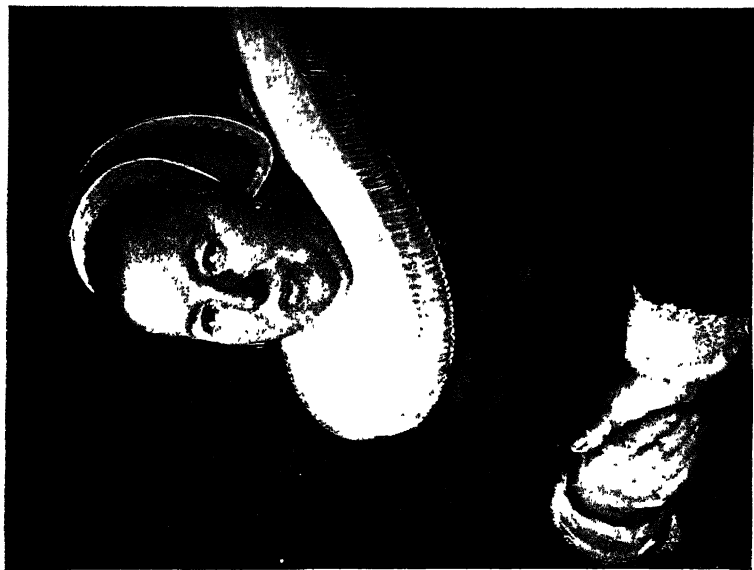
## THE NETHERLANDS

fifty years old. The previous phase of the painter's work can be well studied in *The Laughing Cavalier*, No. 84 in the Wallace Collection, a crisp, decisive painting executed with much spirit but also with a certain elaboration. Our picture shows how in the nine years which intervened between the two pictures the style of Hals had grown broader, more simple, and more summary. Black, white, yellow ochre and a few touches of red compose the painter's palette, and the whole seems to have been executed at a single sitting, much as a skilful artist might make a rapid study in chalk. The broad masses of half-tone appear to have been laid in first, direct upon the ground, the high lights and the touches of darker colour defining the forms being then put in firmly. The success of such a process naturally depends upon its absolute accuracy at every stage. The least slip or carelessness in mapping out the planes, in adjusting the tones, or in adding the sharp final strokes would be fatal. Indeed in accuracy of eye and certainty of hand Hals may challenge comparison with the greatest, for the occasions when he falls short of his best standard, and it is a wonderful standard, are comparatively few. There is too a very sound taste and science at the back of this evident virtuosity. Only taste and science could have simplified the head in so masterly and convincing a fashion, and indicated with such miraculous shorthand the whiteness and complexity of the ruff.

The *Portrait of a Woman* (1021) is no less firm, but is somewhat more minutely and scrupulously worked, in this respect coming half-way between No. 1251 and



PORTRAIT OF A MAN



FRANS HALS  
PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN



MAN HOLDING A GLOVE



LADY WITH A FAN

FRANS HALS

## DUTCH PORTRAITS

*The Laughing Cavalier.* It is an admirable specimen of the painter's technical practice, of his habit of modelling the head by means of accurately adjusted half-tones, and then giving relief and vivacity by the crisp touches which define the nose and mark the humour and penetration of the eyes. The ruff, too, is a miracle of swift accurate brush-drawing. But while the general carefulness and precision might seem to suggest a relatively early date, the colour suggests the painter's later style. The work has now become almost a monochrome, black and white being relieved only by the faintest possible suggestion of red in the cheeks. In thus simplifying his palette still further, Hals was probably seeking to 'speed up' his already rapid technical procedure. As every painter knows, a portrait study, if successful, and painted at a single sitting, has a life and a likeness which more elaborate methods very rarely attain. With all brilliant executants the difficulty of producing this immediate result lies not in the drawing but in the colour.

When closely viewed, a face is not only found to be made up of a certain group of tones, but these tones are infinitely various in colour, according to the model's complexion and the lighting in which it is seen. These infinite variations of colour cannot be quickly matched upon the palette, and so, when public or personal taste requires them, the artist must needs work much more slowly than one who can use what is practically monochrome, and has to think only of modelling and values and contour. Thus a painter like Hals, with a palette containing little more than black and white, could work

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at a speed infinitely greater than that of a modern painter like Sargent, who has to manipulate a relatively complex series of pigments. Hals clearly judged the effect of vitality, born of swift execution, to be more important than the chromatic realism which he might have attained with a fuller palette. So in this *Portrait of a Woman* we may admire the summary drawing of the hands, but unless we are reminded of it hardly think of noticing that they are mostly black and white, and have not any real resemblance to the colour of human hands. Again, in the *Man holding a Glove* (2528), a typical late work of the artist, we have a picture which is practically a monochrome and which is executed in the most free and dashing style. It is a masterly thing, but we can understand why such work might not be popular in a country which, above all others, was attached to scrupulous minuteness and smoothness of execution. From the letters which conventional people write to the papers in our own day, it is easy to imagine what accusations of anarchy, impudence, or senility would be muttered against so daring an innovator.

When Hals is compared with other portrait painters he is often regarded as superficial, as a mere painter of externals with no thought for the underlying character and temper. Certainly he is one of those whose sitters seem more often to be members of a society, and in this case a practical and convivial society, than individuals with sensitive or complex personalities. Yet such a criticism must not be pressed too far. Whether by accident or preference, the majority of the painters' male subjects undoubtedly are of the robust

## DUTCH PORTRAITS

full-blooded burgher type, without any apparent interests beyond good living and their business; but a few of the men, and more than a few of the women, show no little insight into those finer shades of temperament in which a great portrait painter delights. Our *Lady with a Fan* (2529) will serve as an example. Not only is it full of those felicities of execution which are, so to speak, the hallmarks of the painter, but they are here tempered with a suavity appropriate to the lady herself, so pleasant and sensible and humorous, and so intimately observed that Rembrandt himself could not have interpreted for us more subtly her singular refinement.

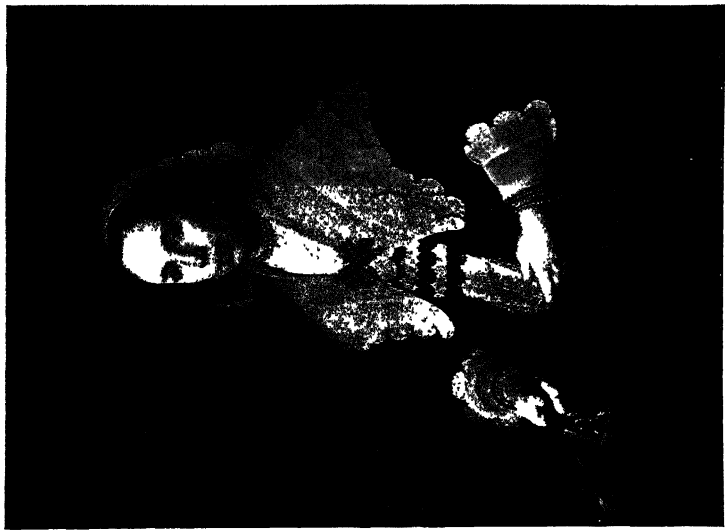
We may note in passing that, when choosing these monochromatic schemes of black and white, Hals may not have been actuated solely by the desire to simplify and accelerate his method of work, so that he might record the momentary aspect of his models without the risk of tiring them by prolonged sittings, or of losing the freshness of his own impression. He may also have felt, as we feel too, that black and grey induce a certain gravity of mood in the spectator, and that by choosing this austere key of colour he was supplying a sort of supplement or corrective to the natural exuberance of his brushwork. He could be sure that his art would never lack Vitality. By this sobriety of tone he gained another quality, that of Repose, so that on the occasions when dignity is demanded of him by the character of his subject, Hals does not fail us.

By the side of Rembrandt and Hals the other Dutch portrait painters seem comparatively small men. Yet there are one or two exceptional pieces which call for



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notice. The *Portrait of a Lady* (1937) originally bore the name of Rembrandt, and indeed is not unworthy even of so great a name. But it is now rightly recognized as being perhaps the finest known example of the popular and prolific Bartholomeus van der HELST. Van der Helst was an able and well trained craftsman, but with no great originality. In the course of a long and successful career he changed his style several times, in accordance either with his personal admirations or the popular taste. For example, in 1645 he painted our *Portrait of a Young Lady* (1248), a cold and rather feeble work in which he seems to be following one of the phases of Mierevelt. Then some five years later he came under the influence of Rembrandt and produced the far nobler work No. 1937, where some portion of the great man's spirit has surely descended upon him. The influence soon fades, and his own rather stolid nature reasserts itself, but in the intermediate stages his work comes singularly near to that of Nicolas MAES, a pupil of Rembrandt who underwent a similar metamorphosis. Our *Portrait of a Lady* (1937) might indeed, but for the date of the costume, have actually been a work by Maes, as the *Portrait of a Man* (1277), a signed and dated work by Maes (and rather a dull one), might have been painted by Van der Helst. Later Maes developed a style of his own which had a considerable vogue both in the Netherlands and in France. Our two portraits by Caspar Netscher (Nos. 2953 and 2954) are examples of this imitation; the style itself may be judged by the *Portrait of a Man* (2581), long catalogued on insufficient grounds as



VAN DER HELST : PORTRAIT OF A LADY



N. MAES : PORTRAIT OF A MAN (2581)



KAREL DU JARDIN : PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN



KAREL FABRITIUS : A MAN IN A FUR CAP

## DUTCH PORTRAITS

representing the famous A. van Leuvenhoek. Here, in spite of the unpleasing oily finish and the undue forcing of the shadows, we find a completeness of modelling and a vivacity of expression which few of the minor Dutchmen attain. If the painting of the hand be compared with the hands in Van der Helst's superb *Portrait of a Lady*, the technical similarity between the two painters will be apparent.

The difficulty of critical discrimination between some of the Dutch masters may be further illustrated by the case of Karel du JARDIN and his signed *Portrait of a Young Man* (1680). At first sight it seems incredible that this luminous, broad and admirable portrait should be by the skilful eclectic painter of little landscapes with cattle whose signature it bears, or indeed that it should be a Dutch painting at all. The style and method suggest French work of the time of Philippe de Champaigne, the costume is French of 1650-1660 rather than Dutch—even the type of the sitter is French. But on looking up the legend of Karel du Jardin, we find that he pursued his studies in Rome, and made his way back to Holland through France. While at Lyons in 1655 he is said to have got into debt to his landlady, and to have discharged it by making her his wife. There is no need therefore to try to explain away the signature of the picture; the story fits exactly the date and fashion of the costume and the style of the painting.

The obscurity surrounding the artistic relations of Karel FABRITIUS with his master, Rembrandt, and the youthful Vermeer of Delft, the extreme rarity and

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variety of his known works, and his violent end, invest him with a halo of interest which does not diminish with time. The discovery and acquisition of the portrait of *A Man in a Fur Cap* (4042), signed and dated 1654 the year of the painter's death, was thus an event of some importance; the more so because the picture, like the earlier portrait at Rotterdam, would appear to represent the painter himself. The man's achievement too has something of the same daring and impulsive character about it which we note in this defiant model. Here he has passed from the twilight world of Rembrandt into the open day. The current practice of portraiture was to set light upon dark. Fabritius reverses the practice, and his figure tells out strongly against the pale sombre sky, although the general key of the picture is quiet and the atmospheric envelopment is quite modern in its completeness. The receding planes of the face are admirably indicated; the head is modelled subtly and solidly in tones which recall the nineteenth century rather than the seventeenth. Fabritius indeed, as we shall see hereafter, was a pioneer and experimentalist who might have become the Manet of Dutch art, had not Fate willed otherwise.

The life-size *Family Group* (1699), both from its scale and its unusual key of colour, never fails to attract an attention which its actual merits hardly warrant. The left half was presented to the Gallery in 1900, and supposed to be an early work by Vermeer of Delft. The right half was found in Paris ten years later, was purchased, and was joined to its fellow. The whole was then ascribed, with some show of reason, to the little-

## DUTCH PORTRAITS

known artist Michael Sweertz. The painting clearly indicates youth, inexperience, ambition and considerable talent. The effort to produce something big and broad and powerful and frank is one which many a young painter of to-day might make, and there is an obvious sincerity about the portraits which gives the picture a perpetual freshness. It is indeed a work of so much vigour and originality that it excites interest in the subsequent career of the painter ; and of this we know very little. He was apparently a gentleman of good family, who pursued his artistic studies in Rome. Afterwards he produced a certain number of etchings and paintings, these last being of considerable excellence. Probably his was one of those talents which need the spur of poverty to rouse them to any continued effort, for his paintings have a solidity of substance and a very personal feeling for cool grey tones (we may see the germ of it in our own picture), which would have ensured professional success had Sweertz been compelled to seek it.

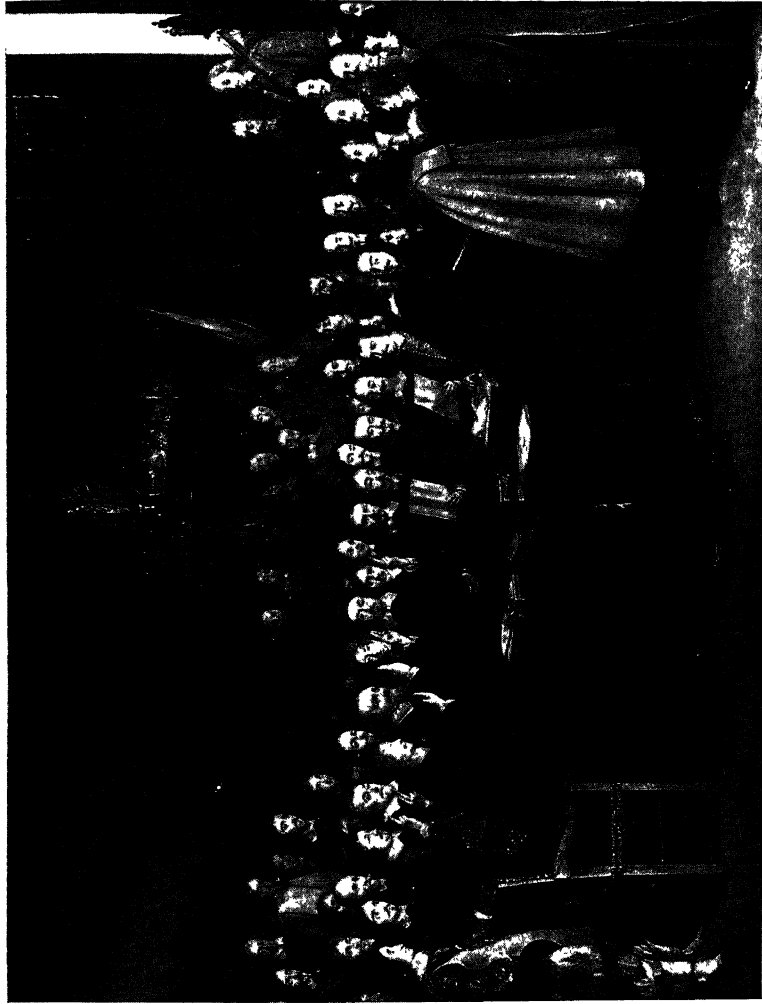
The main tradition of Dutch portraiture is not very well represented in the Gallery, but the Van der Helst portrait above mentioned represents it at its very finest, and it presents few other aspects which are of interest to us to-day. So we need not discuss Cuyp (797 and 2546) or de Keyser (212) or most of the painters associated with Rembrandt. Rembrandt's early companion Lievens grew up to be a heavy eclectic (2864) ; his pupils, Bol and Eeckhout, grew up to be very ordinary craftsmen. Gerard DOU however deserves a moment's attention.

## THE NETHERLANDS

as larger works made them, with all but the greatest, a trifle too quiet and lacking in effectiveness, like the Terborch figure we have discussed. But Holbein and Hilliard showed that into these small paintings it was possible to introduce a force of design and a strength of colour which would have looked garish on a larger scale, and if the hint which they gave had been followed up by subsequent artists, the small houses of to-day would not be so frequently burdened with family portraits which are much too large for them.

Some attractive Flemish portraits of this period also deserve mention. The *Portrait of a Boy* (1137) by Van OOST, a Bruges painter, is not only a fresh and delightful rendering of boyish character but has the additional interest of being immortalized in Pater's 'Imaginary Portrait' of Sebastian van Storck. This portrait is so Dutch in temper that the monogram upon it I.V.O. was long considered to be that of Izaak van Ostade—although he died a year before the date (1650) upon the picture. Another painting of *Two Boys* (3649) by the same master is perhaps an earlier work, as the inspiration of Van Dyck is clearly evident. It shows considerable spirit, and a humour amounting to caricature in the bas-relief representing Gideon and the Fleece. Judging by an admirable picture in the Lyons Gallery, Van Oost is an artist who has not as yet met with adequate recognition.

Lastly we may consider the *Portrait of a Boy* (1810), attributed on no very secure grounds to Duchatel. Few unsigned portraits are more troublesome to the critic than those painted during the course of the

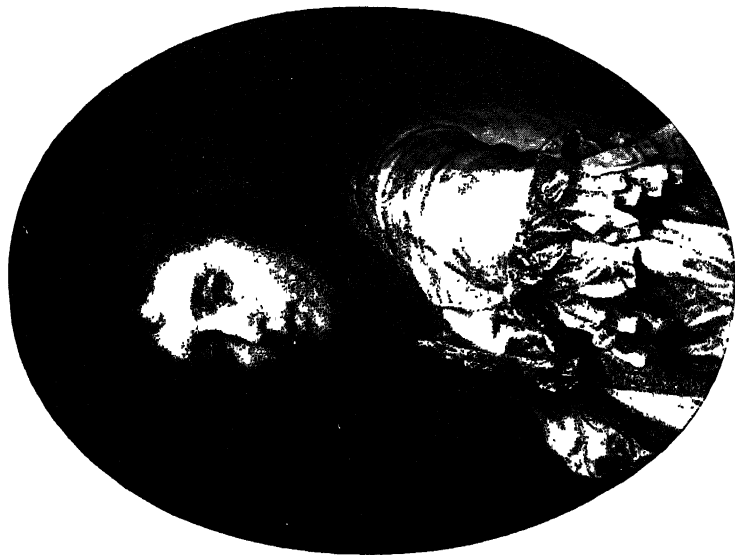


GERARD TERBORCH : PEACE OF MÜNSTER





GERARD DOU : A YOUNG WOMAN



G. COQUES : A MAN

## DUTCH PORTRAITS

seventeenth century, under mixed Flemish and Italian influence. There are a number of charming ladies' portraits attributed to Carlo Maratti which are curiously Flemish in character. Then in Florence and North Italy we have a Fleming, Justus Susterman, as a court painter in a style which is often almost entirely Italian. Susterman has mannerisms which can generally be recognized, but several other capable portraitists who worked about the same time still remain unknown. Certainly they are not portraitists of quite the first rank, but the standard reached by such things as the *Portrait of a Boy*, though not very high, is not contemptible, and the identification of these painters by means of signed or engraved examples is one of the few fields of critical study in which a considerable amount of useful work might even now be done. The provincial portraiture of France also about this time includes several very interesting anonymities, but the chance of identifying them is distinctly less. The sitters in France were rarely men of more than local repute. But these Flemish-Italian portraits were done for a society which in its day was important enough to be popularized by engraving, so that a careful study of seventeenth century prints might throw light upon several dark places in artistic history.

## CHAPTER VI

### DUTCH CONVERSATION-PIECES

As we may divert our leisure with a novel, whereby for the time being we are transported to some new and fascinating society of the author's making, so the Dutchman of the seventeenth century got himself transported from the confines of his house into new scenes and new company through the medium of painting. We might be inclined to take this pictorial translation for a very imperfect and momentary affair. The painted figures on a canvas, being incapable of speech or motion, might be thought incapable also of holding the attention for long. But fine works of art, whatever the medium in which they are executed, have always that quality of Infinity whereby custom cannot wholly stale them. In our novel reading, for example, many of us will prefer to return again and again to our old favourites, to live once more with the people to whom a Thackeray or a Miss Austen may have introduced us, and on each visit to note some fresh trait in their characters or some new felicity in their creator's handling. So it is with the best of the Dutch conversation-pieces. Not only do they make us

## DUTCH CONVERSATION-PIECES

appear to be the actual spectators of the interior of some other house by vivid realism of presentation, but they extract from the scene its full pictorial value, so that when we have exhausted our survey of the principal figures and the details of their environment, we can still find abundant interest in the artist's choice of materials, in the subtlety of their disposition and in their technical management.

The curious *Peepshow* (3832) by S. van Hoogstraten may be taken as typical of the Dutch taste in realism. Here we have something intended to be the very image of nature : a household interior giving the illusion of actual recession or solidity, just as real living rooms and their furniture would do. Only in this case the perspective of an interior, which for the ordinary painter had become a thing readily solved by a little elementary geometry, is so elaborated that the aesthetic purpose becomes for the moment quite subordinate. The problem of correctly presenting such a complex vista of rooms and passages upon five sides of a rectangular box is one not for art but for mathematics. Yet the idea of visual illusion, which is the *raison d'être* of this scientific toy, was rarely absent from the best painting done in Holland during the seventeenth century. Rembrandt of course is a notable exception. As Florentine painting aspired to the condition of sculpture in low relief, so Dutch painting may be said to have aspired to the condition of an open window, and the capacity of the Dutch artists may for the most part be estimated by the degree in which that ideal was realized by them.

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Tavern pieces were the first to win popularity. During the Spanish domination the Low Countries had produced, in addition to more conventional 'drolleries,' a group of satiric and grotesque paintings in which we may trace a natural resentment against the spiritual and political repression from which the Netherlanders then suffered. When strain was relaxed the laughter could become more kindly. Men could now turn from the *diableries* of Bosch, and the somewhat bitter jesting of Pieter Brueghel, to smile at the humours of the peasant and the pothouse as depicted by Adriaen BROUWER. Brouwer, like a harmless Villon, lived by preference in the company which his works present to us. Unluckily the tavern scenes of this rare artist are ill represented at Trafalgar Square. The little painting from the Salting Collection of *Three Boors drinking* (2569) must, I think, be an early work. It is hard and smooth in pigment, not remarkable in design, and somewhat fusty in colour. The *Tavern scene*, at present on loan to the Gallery, is richer and stronger, but even more typical is the *Boor Asleep* (211) in the Wallace Collection, for here we can get an idea of the largeness of design which, with his singular genius as a colourist, forms Brouwer's chief claim to be remembered. His gifts as a landscape painter will be noticed later.

As a designer he may claim to have solved, before Rembrandt solved it, the problem of fusing a group of figures so completely with their environment that the whole is combined into a perfect unity, both tonal and atmospheric, without any sacrifice of force or

## DUTCH CONVERSATION-PIECES

substance. Brouwer's little clusters of brawling peasants have the solidity of spirited statuettes, and their setting is arranged with a taste in avoiding the superfluous no less exigent than Vermeer's. The individual figures too are curiously square and massive, so that a good picture by Brouwer conveys, even in a reproduction, much of that satisfaction which we derive from good Florentine work. Brouwer's colour I can best describe in sentences used previously<sup>1</sup> about Fra Filippo Lippi, "The broad masses are varied everywhere with flushes of unexpected grey or purple. His blues for example are no longer positive ultramarine, but dim mysterious powder-blues; his reds grow into hues which we can but describe by words like 'mulberry' or 'crushed strawberry,' his purples have the bloom of a grape or a plum." Such colours, with occasionally some precious passage of lemon yellow, touched into a ground of transparent golden brown with just the appropriate lightness or vigour, render the best works of Brouwer an education in technical beauty. Unhappily these master-pieces are rare. Brouwer died at the age of thirty-three, and his irregular life, while it may have inspired his genius, was no doubt responsible also for the inequality of its products.

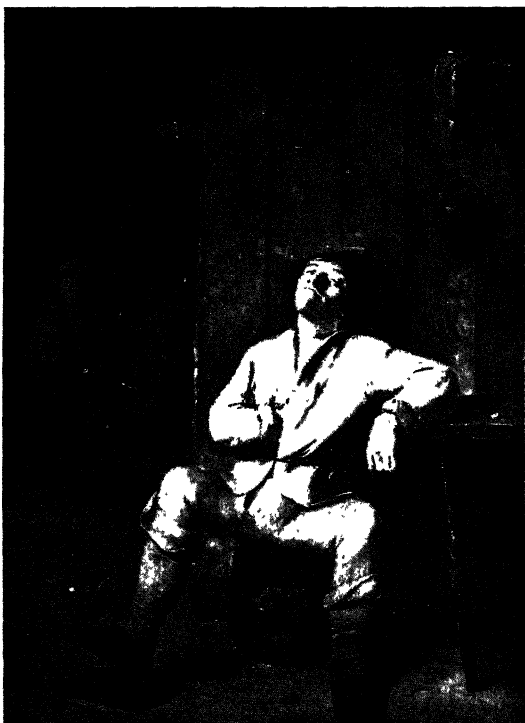
Adrian van OSTADE was one of Brouwer's fellow pupils under Frans Hals. His more pedestrian talent was devoted almost entirely to the Dutch peasant, whose ways of life he studied with insight and sympathy. All that the science of formal composition can teach, all that industry can accumulate, he combines with con-

<sup>1</sup> *The National Gallery, Italian Schools*, p. 54.

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siderable technical ability. Yet Ostade remains rather a dull and gloomy little painter. He can harmonize certain definite notes of deep blue and red with a general tone of brown, he draws the Dutch peasant and his wife with considerable spirit, and he builds up his compositions soundly, but our *Alchemist* (846) will suffice to illustrate his limitations,—his habit of piling up innumerable insignificant forms into conventional pyramids, his monotonous colouring, his artificial illumination, and (worst perhaps of all) his heavy tonality, which interferes even with such modest amusement as we may wish to derive from the hundred and one details with which the panel is crowded.

David TENIERS the younger, though it is the fashion to despise him, is at his best a far more interesting artist. When he follows in the footsteps of Brouwer, as in our *Music Parry* (154), Teniers paints admirably. The colouring of the piece is brilliant, the handling delightful, and there is a genuine vehemence about the old lute player which is sheer inspiration. The group dimly seen round the fire in the background is worthy of Brouwer himself. Oddly enough what seems to be the companion picture, No. 158, has none of these merits; the figures are unconvincing and the colour cold and opaque. *Players at Tric-Trac* (242) is another fine example. Once more we have glowing golden colour, once more the similarity in the background to the style of Brouwer. The average work of Teniers has not quite this warmth and transparency. It is only in his early products that the direct influence of Brouwer prevails. And in one picture at least the



ADRIAN BROUWER : BOOR ASLEEP

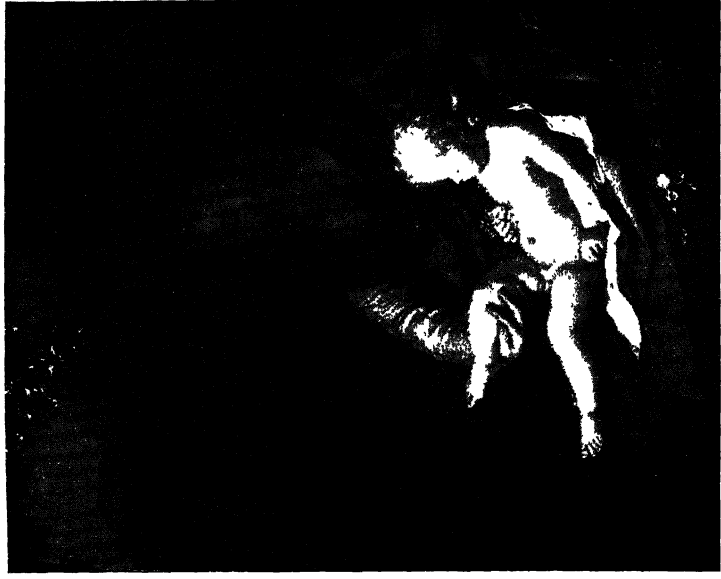


TENIERS : MUSIC PARTY





JAN STEEN : THE MUSIC MASTER



ADRIAEN VAN DER WERFF : REPOSE IN EGYPT

## DUTCH CONVERSATION-PIECES

two have collaborated. The large *Landscape with a Sunset*, ascribed to Rembrandt in the Duke of Westminster's Collection, is now recognized as a work by Brouwer in which the figures have been painted by Teniers. This picture has a further interest for us, as we shall see later, for it determined the authorship of one of the most interesting landscapes in the National Gallery, the *Tobias and the Angel* (72), which for more than a century bore Rembrandt's name.

This influence of Brouwer upon Teniers quickly waned. Teniers did not possess that instinct for large designing from which Brouwer's little pot-house paintings derive their grandeur, nor had he Brouwer's singular refinement of colour and pigment. Teniers was essentially a smaller man, pleased with his own dexterity. Hence his compositions quickly become too elaborate and too full of detail: hence the habit of painting with clever flicks of the brush grows into a mannerism. Yet Teniers never quite forgot the fine technical tradition in which he was trained, and so even his colder and more artificial works retain a pleasant transparency in the shadows. But the declination from his early standard is considerable, and is the more evident because the man's temper was really shallow. *The Surprise* (862) will serve to mark the transition. It is dexterous; but the lighting is forced, the effect airless, the figures unsubstantial, and the colour has lost the glow and fusion of his early time. *Dives in Hell* (863) and the *Money Changers* (155) are excellent specimens of the more elaborate and heavier style of his maturity. We need not really discuss Teniers further, any more

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than we need spend serious thought over the thin superficialities of Dirk Hals (1074), the frigid merriment of Hendrik Pot (1278), or the barrack-room episodes of Duyster (1386 and 1387).

Jan STEEN, a more considerable figure than Teniers, is represented at Trafalgar Square abundantly rather than well. His natural facility was immense, his power of design remarkable ; instability of character alone prevented him from ranking with the greatest masters of his age and country. His facility and his habits of life led him to produce far too much and, for all his accomplishment, too carelessly. Also while his own convivial and satiric humour remained a constant source of inspiration, he was without any fixed technical conviction. He was content to work in the manner of any master by whom he happened at the moment to be interested, and the stylistic resemblance is often so close that we can make a very fair chronological arrangement of Steen's painting simply by noting the sequence of influences which he underwent.<sup>1</sup>

Our *Skittle-Players* (2560) shows him working in early manhood under the momentary influence of Paul Potter. In spirit, in freshness of colour, in atmospheric quality, and in brilliancy of lighting the little picture ranks with the very best things of its class. Rivalry with Metsu is evident in *The Music Master* (856), but here Steen set himself a task which proved a little beyond his powers. It was not for want of effort, as the minute brushwork indicates, that he fell short of his purpose. The general effect is vivid enough, the

<sup>1</sup> See the *Burlington Magazine* for July, 1909, vol. xv. p. 243.

## DUTCH CONVERSATION-PIECES

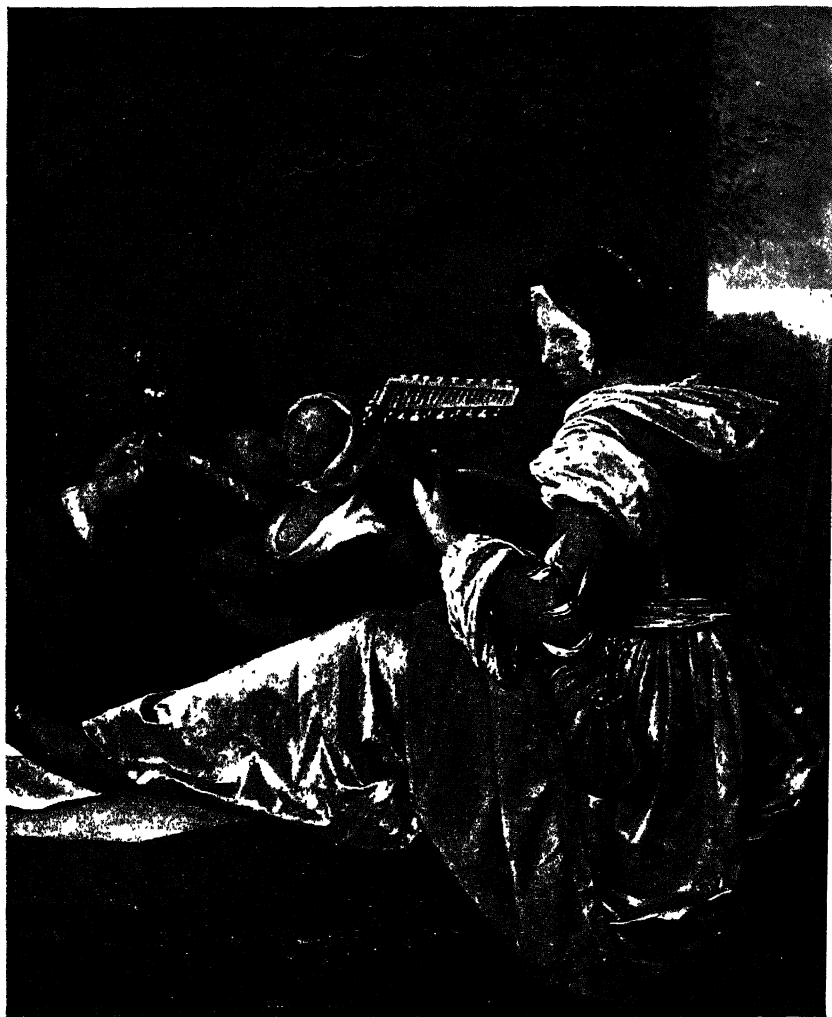
colouring admirable, the dull earnest young lady is a miracle of humorous insight; but the figures are a trifle metallic and lack that perfect atmospheric adjustment to the space around them which the greatest Dutch masters obtain. Similar but far more conspicuous defects will be found in the *Grace before Meat* (2558), at first sight a most attractive design. It will not however stand prolonged examination. Neither the lighting of the figures, their spatial relations, their modelling, nor even their handling are what they ought to be. As a contrast to this slipshod painting *The Harpsichord Lesson* (154) in the Wallace Collection might be quoted. Here the design is simplified as in the best work of Metsu and Vermeer, while the figure of the music master rising from his chair has the peculiar largeness and grandeur which Steen in his noblest moments undeniably possessed, and is painted with exceptional solidity and force. Our *Interior with Figures* (1378), executed in *grisaille*, also has something of this largeness, but the execution has not done justice to the design, so that the result is airless and thin. Despite musty colour and sundry incongruities of detail, the *Terrace Scene with Figures* (1421) is quite Italian in the grandeur of its planning. It must have been some picture of this type which moved Reynolds to speak of Steen with 'the highest approbation.' Still more superb is the woman's figure in *The Lute Player* (411) of the Wallace Collection, in her blue and yellow bodice and that amazing skirt. Steen's period of mastery and independence was unhappily brief. He fell back in his later years to imitations of Gerard Dou,

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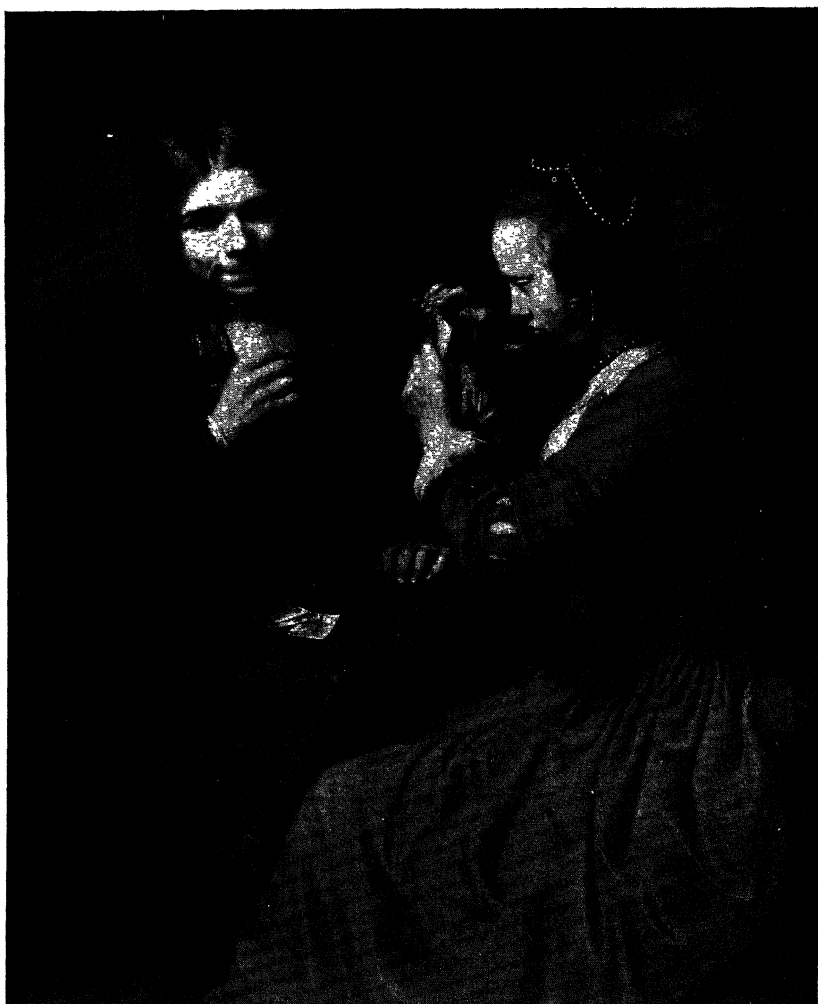
to hot colouring and to careless brushwork for which all his humour and readiness could not make amends.

The two excellent miniature portraits by Gerard Dou have already been mentioned. His ordinary standard may be judged from *The Poulterer's Shop* (825). Dou gained repute by the scrupulous care which he spent upon every detail in his pictures. As might be expected the result is a smooth and monotonous texture, which robs the eye of any pleasure which may come from lively handling or atmospheric suggestion, as it robs the design of all emphasis. It is particularly curious to find this fault in a pupil of Rembrandt. Yet if Dou was a small man, unable to comprehend the expressive powers of his medium, he at least learned from his master the art of arranging his matter tolerably. The actual placing of his figures and his disposition of light and shadow are sometimes admirable. Even the elaborate polish with which he afterwards spoils these good beginnings appears workmanlike, nay positively attractive, if we compare it with the futility of some of his followers. *The Fish and Poultry Shop* (841) of William van Mieris will serve as an appropriate and awful example.

We must, if we are to be logical, include in this condemnation of high polish the once famous Adriaen van der WERFF. If polish be an offence, he is the worst offender of all. But it is impossible to deny the man's diabolical accomplishment. We may think it merely common in his soapy, complacent *Self-portrait* (1660): we may just tolerate it and even admit some pretty colour in *The Mousetrap* (3049). But the *Repose*



JAN STEEN  
THE LUTE PLAYER (DETAIL)



NICOLAS MAES  
CARD PLAYERS

## DUTCH CONVERSATION-PIECES

*in Egypt* (3909) recently acquired from the Grosvenor House Collection cannot be lightly dismissed. We have to allow that the design, though theatrical, is effective, and that the colour has a powerful if corrupt attractiveness. A Teutonic Correggio painting for an Augustus the Strong—that is the impression which the work conveys. The blues in the picture, like the silvery tones of the landscape, suggest just such a perversion; the Virgin's sleeve and arm have their exact parallel in the S. Catharine of the *Giorno* at Parma. Correggio would have admired the flakes of faint sunlight which fall through the leaves upon the Virgin's head and bosom; he would have been fascinated by the refinements of brushwork which close inspection reveals almost everywhere. The petals of the wild-rose, for example, are such miracles of craftsmanship that for them we can pardon other offences. Yet it is as well perhaps that we have only a single specimen of Van der Werff's compositions. If a number were seen together, as in one or two German galleries, the uniform porcelain-like surfaces would make the result intolerable. Indeed it is odd that a man whose perceptions were in some ways so amazingly acute should have been blind to his own essential monotony.

Nicolas MAES, too, has already been discussed as a portrait painter. Being a man of a much more receptive and versatile temper than Dou, he learned Rembrandt's principles of concentration and emphasis more thoroughly. So in the subject pieces of his youth he makes a fine beginning. *Card Players* (1247) was indeed once attributed to Rembrandt, and even now



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some good judges hesitate to assign the picture to Maes, although the colour and the man's type appear to be characteristic of him and of nobody else. Few productions of the Rembrandt school have greater breadth and force than this. There is daring in the filling of nearly half the picture space with the girl's vermilion dress, contrasted only with various tones of brown and black. The experiment of a young man of talent rather than the balanced work of a full-grown master, it is still a remarkable painting, and but for a certain heaviness of tone, and a disproportion between the importance of the scale and that of the subject, would deserve still higher praise.

This last fault is one which the members of the Dutch School rarely commit, but it has been the ruin of almost all painters of 'conversation-pieces' in our own day. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whether by experience or by natural good taste, these pleasant unheroic interpretations of contemporary life were by common consent painted on a modest scale. Even when they were destined to hang in large houses this modesty of scale was preserved. In England it was sufficient for Hogarth, in France for Watteau and Chardin. But towards the end of the nineteenth century a change set in. In the huge annual exhibitions of works by living men, such as the Paris *Salon* and the Royal Academy in England, the painter of conversation-pieces some two feet square found his little pictures overwhelmed by life-size portraiture, or figure painting on the heroic scale. A few artists had

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the taste and the courage to remain unmoved in the face of this menace : the majority were frightened into rivalry. Their figures were increased practically to life-size and, in the exhibition galleries, these big conversation-pieces appeared to hold their own with the big bright pictures round them. Also when reproduced on a small scale they might enjoy some popularity. But gradually it came to be seen by the more discerning that these big pictures were a mistake. In a private house they were clearly impossible. The figures by their mere bigness became monsters oppressing the living occupants. Only in galleries resembling the exhibitions in which they had first appeared could such paintings be hung without manifest incongruity. Municipal collections for a while provided this convenient outlet, but even there certain innate weaknesses in this type of work have become apparent. Now, when space is needed for other exhibits, these large figure pieces (with the kindred portraiture) are among the first things to be relegated to a passage or a store room.

Generally they deserve their fate. In a palace or a great public building large decorative paintings may be appropriate, and yet may have no very profound purpose nor any great fullness of 'content.' When we enjoy the sight of some vast ceiling by Tiepolo we do not examine ourselves very closely as to the meaning of all his airy imagery of clouds and soaring figures. Their rhythm and colour, exactly suited to their place and purpose, are in themselves a sufficient justification. But the ordinary figure subject, and in particular

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the ordinary 'conversation-piece' is more near to us and to earth, more substantial, more positive, more intimate. Its purpose is to be close at hand, to charm and interest us when our eyes rest upon it. If its size makes it appear the least bit oppressive that purpose is defeated.

But excess of scale has other disadvantages. To appreciate fully the artistic presentment of a scene, it is necessary that the eye should be able to grasp the whole at once, to note without effort the general effect of the design—the rhythmic play of contours and masses and colours which give it life and significance. In any ordinary house this is possible only when a picture is either rather small, or else, like fine eighteenth century portraits, so simple in its planning that we can fasten at once upon the points of emphasis. In similar conditions a large painting can only be seen piecemeal, and any subtleties of planning which it may contain can never have full justice done to them.

Again, by excess of scale the interest of a picture, like that of a poem, may be diluted to extinction. The things and people of every-day life, when painted life-size, lack the fascination they possess when we see them mirrored 'in little.' It is almost impossible on a large scale to avoid monotony of surface and texture, a fault specially unpleasing when placed so close to us that we cannot escape from it. However skilfully the painter may seek to evade this monotony by tricks of brushwork, it is inherent in the conditions he has set himself. It is bound to fetter his hand, struggle as he will. Few minds can retain their alertness through

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all the labour of representing some large expanse of wall or draperies. But on a smaller scale these become a delightful theme for the artist's brush, and no less exciting to paint than the niceties of heads and hands, the points which we scrutinize when we wish to gauge a man's place as a craftsman. So the virtues of concentration, of lively workmanship (and therewith of lively expression), as well as the supreme virtue of appropriateness, are found in the 'conversation-piece' only when it is relatively small.

I say 'relatively' because there is in practice a limit beyond which reduction in size may clearly not be an advantage. When we see a 'conversation-piece' painted on a miniature scale, as with certain works by Meissonier, we may wonder at the dexterity which such minute craftsmanship must involve, but we feel that the result is somehow unsatisfactory. As decoration all such tiny paintings must be scraps. Unless we have youthful eyes we can only see them completely with effort or a magnifying glass. And even in the most favourable conditions we miss somehow the glamour of atmosphere and reality, the sense of spaciousness which the ordinary scale of a Metsu or a Vermeer so readily admits.

If we recall the suggestion that the appropriate ideal for these pictures is that of an open window we shall see at once where the fault lies. A window eighteen, or even fifteen, inches square is large enough for a spectator to look through comfortably and to give a clear view of what lies beyond. That view too, if translated into paint, is on a scale large enough to be a

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pleasant decorative asset in a moderate sized room. But a tiny picture is a mere peephole. We look into it with discomfort, and upon a wall it tells as a mere spot. When a very small picture delights us we shall usually find that it is a thing to be held in the hand as we may hold some miniature by Holbein or Hilliard or Cooper, and that it is most satisfying when it most nearly approaches the ideal of the precious stone or the jewel, an ideal which has nothing in common with that of the open window. I feel that even such a masterpiece of airy naturalism as Constable's *Study for Dedham Vale* (2654) would be a still more precious landscape if it were nine or ten times its present size. Steen's charming *Skittle Players* (2560), again, could with advantage have been rather larger. Similar mistakes in scale rob *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (3290) by Ingres, and the *Sunset in Auvergne* (2635) by Rousseau, of much of their potential impressiveness, and loth though we may be to admit such heresy, the audacious design of the *View in Delft* (3714) by Fabritius is compressed so unduly that the picture looks at first sight like a mere amusing toy.

We seem then in the matter of scale to have a debatable ground, where paintings are too large to be fine miniatures and too small to be fine pictures. Upon this ground even the greatest masters do not venture with complete impunity. Certainly for men of moderate gifts it is a tract to be avoided. Drawings and watercolours are not controlled by quite the same necessity. A broad mount, if well designed, will relieve the feeling of restriction which we experience

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when a small drawing is too closely framed. Also, if naturalism be the aim, the lightness of a wash of pale colour will suggest atmosphere and spaciousness on a few square inches of paper, as Rembrandt's drawings prove. Oriental miniatures illustrate the limits within which the opposite ideal, that of the precious stone, can be successfully followed. The finest are seldom more than eight or ten inches in height. Watercolour, indeed, of every kind is perhaps most happy and appropriate when employed on the scale which is perilous to the painter in oil. Yet to pursue the inquiry in this place would lengthen intolerably a digression which already has grown far too long. We had better return to Nicolas Maes.

Had he retained all his life the excellences which distinguish his two dated subject pieces in the National Gallery (Nos. 159 and 207), Maes might have been one of the first figures in the Dutch School. Both these pictures belong to the year 1655 when he was still a young man, strongly affected by the example of his master Rembrandt, but following that example in his own way. He adopts, for instance, Rembrandt's habit of concentrating a strong light upon the principal group, and surrounding this lighted mass with an appropriate 'atmosphere' of warm, dark shadow. Also he has planned the two pictures admirably. The mistake in scale of the *Card Players* is not repeated, but each design is painted on a panel which exactly suits it. Had *The Cook Maid* (159) been of the size of *The Idle Servant* (207), it would have lost something of its

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intimacy ; had *The Idle Servant* been painted a quarter of its present size (like the *Cookmaid*) the design would have lost its dignity. In each painting the proportions of light and shade and the placing of the figures, both in relation to the picture space and to the foreground and background, are perfectly adjusted, while the figures themselves are life-like, substantial and admirably realized. There is none of that failure to suggest solidity which we have often to forgive in men like Teniers or Jan Steen. The colour is less varied than with most of the other Dutchmen. White, red and black are the dominant notes, with tones of deep grey-blue or purple for relief. From these simple materials Maes gets an effect which is not only harmonious but which also possesses uncommon strength.

Nor was he deficient in humour and insight. In *The Idle Servant* the humour is broad and obvious. The subject is one which Hogarth might have sketched, though the appeal to the spectator would have been less naïvely direct. *The Cookmaid* is more subtle. The Dutch painters were often very acute observers of the feelings of children. There was a *Sick Child* by Metsu in the Steengracht collection at The Hague, in the expression of wistful helplessness unparalleled. Close by it used to hang a Terborch, *A Mother combing her Daughter's Hair*, which is now in the Mauritshuis. The interplay of two opposing forces in the little girl's face, immobility compelled by the stress of the comb and a lively interest in what is going on in the room, has been caught by Terborch with so much vivacity

## DUTCH CONVERSATION-PIECES

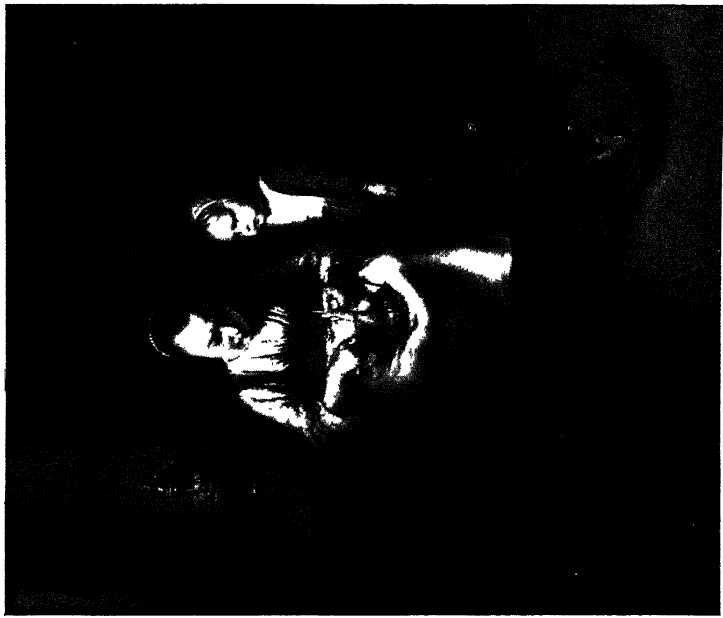
and humour that the picture is one of his masterpieces. In the *Cookmaid*, the scraping of the parsnip has become one of those events which in childhood so wholly fascinate and absorb us that time appears to stand still as long as the mysterious operation is in progress. Maes here goes right to the heart of childhood.

But with these excellences we must admit certain defects. As a painter pure and simple Maes does not usually give us the pleasure which some other Dutch craftsmen can do. *The Cookmaid* is a fortunate exception. Elsewhere, though his results are solid, his brushwork is apt to be monotonous. His touch has not the vivacity of a Metsu or the delicacy of a Terborch so that his pictures by comparison with theirs look a trifle heavy. And from this lack of variety and crispness, it comes that while his pictures have substance, the substance is all of the same sort. In *The Idle Servant*, for example, everything might have been made of some kind of wool : in his later portraits the material of the faces and clothes is too evidently wax. Nor is his lighting quite satisfactory. He obtains extraordinary vigour of effect by concentrating the illumination upon his figures in the manner of Rembrandt, and contrasting this brightness with a dark background. In Rembrandt's work we accept the contrast : it is a necessary part of the imaginative atmosphere in which his subjects are presented. Maes tries to reconcile his artifice with a treatment which is otherwise realistic. But when once we have been stimulated by this realism we instinctively begin to look for it in all

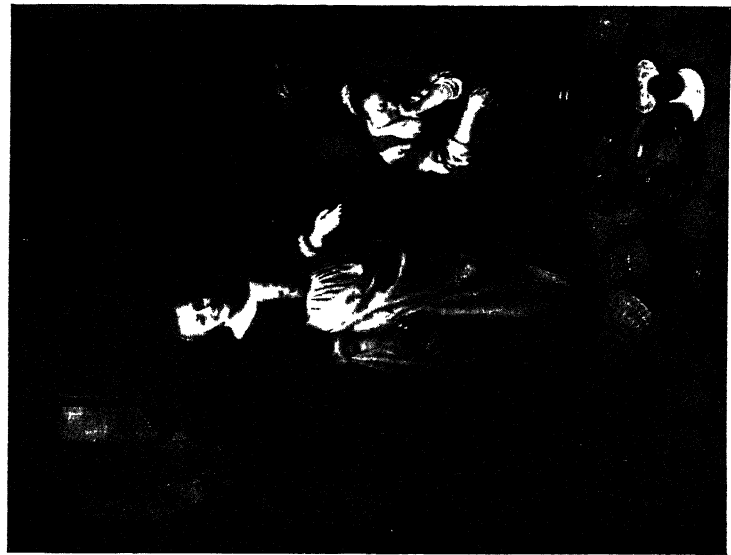


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parts of the painting, and then we become aware of inconsistencies. We find the lights are too bright, and the shadows too black, and that the air is not, as it ought to be, the air of our common day. In all but the foreground of *The Idle Servant* it has turned into a dark brown fog.



THE COOK MAID



THE IDLE SERVANT

NICOLAS MAES



GERARD TERBORCH  
THE GUITAR LESSON

## CHAPTER VII

## TERBORCH AND METSU

WHAT we have already learned about the scale and treatment proper to a good cabinet picture does not by any means exhaust the subject. We may take for granted the necessity of good design, clarity of presentation, rhythmic ordering of tones and masses and contours and colour—these are qualities common to all fine painting. And we may take for granted too the need for making the things or persons in the picture carry conviction to the spectator by seeming solid and substantial, where such a quality is appropriate. But we must not forget that the cabinet picture is intended to hang upon the wall of a room: it may therefore not always be very strongly lighted, especially upon dark days. Hence it must have considerable luminosity of tone, unless its most delicate beauties are to become, in all but the most favourable circumstances, practically invisible. Like the glimpse through an open window to which we have likened it, the cabinet picture must seem full of light. So generally speaking, the best cabinet pictures prove in the end to be those where this quality is most conspicuous, and most subtly

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blended with the suggestion of space and atmosphere. If the glimpse through our imaginary window fails to convey this idea of luminous airy recession, the painter has missed his mark.

To the casual observer the kind of realism required to produce such an effect might not seem to be a very complicated affair. To match the tones of nature with perfect verisimilitude may indeed be rather difficult for all but practised craftsmen; yet since the painter can have nature continually before him, he ought to be able to detect instinctively where his copy deviates from the model. Now the Dutch were highly trained craftsmen, so we must pause for a moment to consider why the complete conquest of realism by them was delayed so long, and why the victory was so short lived. Realism being still one of the recurrent problems and ideals of the modern artist, the inquiry is not without some practical interest for us.

The Dutch started with tavern scenes: but how can the painter of tavern scenes be a whole-hearted realist? His subject matter entices or compels him to look first of all for what is humorous or tragic, or in any case effectively picturesque, in the scene he presents. Only when these elements of dramatic expression have been secured does the question of realism of tone and lighting arise. But if that realism can only be attained by some sacrifice of expressive force, can we blame a painter if he declines to weaken his picture, and leaves realism to take care of itself? Where strongly marked character or vigorous action has to be presented, we all know that the suggestion of them given by a rapid sketch

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has a vivacity which vanishes if the sketch is worked, however skilfully, into a highly finished picture. So the successful painting of such things comes to be in the nature of sketching, a process of swift drawing with the brush, in which precise notation of the tones and textures of nature counts for comparatively little. Rubens had the secret of this lively craft. Brouwer and Teniers are among his technical children. But the wise Rubens, observing that oil paintings inevitably get darker and browner with the lapse of time, was careful to minimize this danger by keeping his general tone as bright as he could, and by employing a thin free transparent brushwork which allowed the white ground to shine through it. The Dutch painters used a similar method, but seeking for greater contrast, they set their figures against dark backgrounds, and in general painted more slowly and more solidly. It is therefore comparatively seldom that we find in them a brightness of tone comparable to that of Rubens ; too often their pictures are heavy in the shadows.

When, however, we once get away from subjects to which vigorous action or strongly marked character is an essential, when our concern is with rest rather than with motion, with subtlety rather than with force, the necessity for lively brush drawing diminishes and the claims of a fuller realism become predominant. So long then as the Dutch painters concerned themselves with the humours of the tavern and the cottage, the lively sketching of Brouwer was an appropriate method of work. The quieter domestic life of the middle and upper classes demanded from the artist a much more

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searching naturalism. As in a novel, such subjects lose almost all their savour if they lack verisimilitude. The smallest trait of expression or gesture may prove an essential and most important factor in the artistic result. The distinction between these two ideals never seems to have been generally recognized or clearly enunciated. So a minute realism is attempted in subjects, like battle-pieces, where the most lively brush-work is appropriate; so, no less frequently, painters accustomed to vigorous handling forget that in subjects of a static type the work will be unconvincing if the tones are not accurately noted and precisely adjusted. The inequalities in Dutch painting, where they are not due to innate dullness, may generally be traced to one or other of these causes.

We must note, however, that their cabinet pictures rarely err from one fault which is common enough among their modern successors, namely undue projection. The competitive spirit of our exhibitions drives the painter to seek effectiveness at any cost, and tempts him to force his work upon the observer's notice by giving his figures so much brightness and relief that they seem to be set right up against the picture frame, and perhaps even to extend beyond it. When such a picture is surrounded by similar importunate canvases it may seem to hold its own; but the moment that it is removed from an exhibition and placed on the wall of a living-room, its excessive relief may become an oppression. The figures, instead of remaining at a respectful distance where we can watch them as we will, ourselves unseen, appear to have

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come up to the edge of the picture-frame and to be watching *us*. Instead of being the observers and owners we become the observed, the inferiors. Too forcible life-size portraits may also develop this disquieting interest in our privacy. Even when in a cabinet picture the figures are no more than two feet high, to paint them as if they were close to or projecting beyond the frame is to make them seem intrusive mannikins. The eye instinctively asks for a certain degree of recession to make such a scale convincing, and it is the business of the painter, by means of perspective and atmospheric quality, to suggest that appropriate remoteness.

Having now considered a few of the general principles which appear to govern the making of cabinet pictures, we may turn to the little group of men who brought the craft to perfection in Holland. We have already spoken of TERBORCH as a portrait painter ; as a painter of cabinet-pictures he was even more famous. Coming of less humble parentage than many of his fellow artists, and being introduced by his portrait commissions to the best society of the time, his pictures reflect this distinction both in the refinement of their craftsmanship and the scenes which they depict. Terborch shows us by preference the Dutch lady and gentleman of his day, and his types have an air of good-breeding, even when the occupations upon which they are engaged are not remarkable either for dignity or for delicacy. He shows excellent taste, not only in the scale and ordering of his design, in his workman-



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ship and in his colour, but in the choice of moments when there seems to be, as it were, a pause in the action of his little painted play, the instant between question and answer or between two notes of music. Our *Guitar Lesson* (864) is an admirable example. In virtue of this static quality in his subject-matter, Terborch, like Metsu, De Hooch and Vermeer, is able to use the highest degree of finish without running the risk of losing vivacity. Thus in our *Guitar Lesson* the head and hand of the music master beating time, the very points upon which the action centres, are modelled with the most complete and dexterous refinement, yet there is no sacrifice of life and energy—their gesture is life itself. The right arm and hand of the girl also illustrate Terborch's extraordinary skill with the brush, and many other passages of great beauty will be noticed in the picture.

Why then is the whole effect less completely satisfying than that of several other works in the same room? The design of the group fits together well enough, the hat and face of the standing man completing it above, as the corner of the tablecloth and the ace of spades complete it upon the floor below. But the bed, the picture, and the door behind, make an awkward pattern, and leave the sensation that the room is too small for the people in it. The dark tone of the work does not help in removing this oppression. The room looks close, and while the lady, the table and the music master are solid enough, the standing figure is a creature without substance. The colour, too, though harmonious, has not much vitality. The yellow and white

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of the lady's dress are admirably foiled with a dull deep blue, but this contrast and the fine deep reds of the tablecloth are not enough to enliven the general sombre scheme. The satin dress has been unduly praised. Terborch was famous for his painting of satin, and the reputation appears to have misled him. Too often he over-elaborates the folds and the sheen of the material, so that, as in this picture, it acquires the sort of waxen polish which we rightly despise when we find it in a Mieris or a Netscher.

And, we may ask, if the satin dress can be so bright, how is it that the remainder is so low in tone? A little force of contrast is secured thereby, but it is secured at the cost of truth. We cannot feel that the room is full of real light and air as we do in the best Dutch cabinet pieces, otherwise the lighting would have been more evenly and uniformly distributed. So our picture, with all its excellences, does not remain in the memory as do certain other works by Terborch where, in emulation of Vermeer and Metsu, he has aimed at a more truthful effect. Of these works the *Concert* at Berlin is perhaps the most widely known. In it Vermeer's influence is paramount, not only in the studied simplicity of the planning, and the vivid daylight which floods the room, but in the vigorous note introduced by the back view of the young 'cellist in the immediate foreground, with her dark fur stole, her vivid red bodice, and the familiar satin skirt, painted on this occasion with masterly breadth and decision. Here, as in one or two famous works by other Dutch masters, we have a back view which appears

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perilously close to the spectator. But a back view has not quite the same intrusive quality as a front view. It does not seem to be watching us, and when the figure is attractive, as in the Berlin painting, it excites an instinctive speculation as to what the lady's face and expression will prove to be.

Gabriel METSU, whose name is usually coupled with that of Terborch, possessed a more lively spirit. Though he died at the age of thirty-seven, he was so precocious (being a painter of repute by the time he was fourteen), and so gifted, that his achievement both in quality and variety is remarkable. Our five examples represent most of his characteristics, with one very important exception. As dates conclusively prove, Metsu more than once anticipated Vermeer of Delft in presenting effects of cool daylight, and of this remarkable phase in his art we possess no quite typical specimen. The two beautiful pictures in the possession of Sir Otto Beit, *The Letter Received* in particular, are examples of it to which those who have access to that fine collection may be referred. The other stages of Metsu's work may be fairly estimated at Trafalgar Square.

Metsu started as the pupil of Gerard Dou, and this artistic descent from Rembrandt is illustrated in our *Old Woman at a Window* (2590), which in its subject, its effect of reflected light, and its restriction to quiet tones of brown and grey, clearly shows the great master's influence. *The Forge* (2591) is a far more vigorous and original effort. Here Metsu breaks away from the accepted type of Dutch composition,

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and makes one of those daring essays in design which may be attributed to the Oriental objects of art then being imported into Holland. Between the years 1645 and 1650, this Oriental taste changed the entire character of the potteries at Delft, and the painters there for a few precious years underwent the same attraction. In our picture the reflection of this impulse is but slight, and secondary to the idea of contrasting the dark interior of the forge, the glow of red hot iron and the glimpse of a cold stormy evening seen through the open door. In the dim half-light the figure of the horseman advancing into the smithy is curiously impressive. Cromwell at some crisis in his career might have looked just so. The picture is full of admirable work: indeed it is perhaps a trifle too elaborate and too crowded with details. The general effect thus fails to carry conviction, while the whole is so low in tone that at first sight we may easily overlook its very considerable merits.

In *The Drowsy Landlady* (970) Metsu shows his true self, though the rude humour of the subject would be more appropriate to Jan Steen. But the peculiar vivacity of Metsu comes out clearly in the contrast between the woman's white collar and her scarlet dress. Here the interest of the picture is focussed, and we can judge the painter's personal gift by the magnificence of the red, and by the quite inimitable painting of the white linen over it. For sheer beauty of substance and texture this white is among the most wonderful things in the Gallery. As a whole the picture is surpassed by Metsu's two works from the Peel Collection,

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so we need not dwell longer upon it after noting this, its particular excellence.

Of the two Peel Collection pictures *The Duet* (838) must be the earlier in date. In it we still find traces of Metsu's artistic descent from Rembrandt, so completely is the whole scene unified by an all-pervading tone of delicate brown, so definitely are the design and the lighting concentrated upon the principal figure, so free and expressive is the brushwork. Indeed as a piece of painting pure and simple *The Duet* may rank with the very finest things of its kind. Brouwer is not so vivid, Terborch not so varied, De Hooch is thinner in substance, Vermeer is more of a mechanic, though a noble one. Here the handling combines breadth and force with the most exquisite finish, the manner and matter of the stroke varying exactly as the occasion demands. At one point the impasto is rich, creamy and solid, at another it is a mere translucent film ; at one point it is sharp and crisp, at another it floats imperceptibly into the adjoining tones. And all these pleasant and appropriate differences are fused into such perfect communion that the painting seems to be made of one exquisite enamel, as compact and harmonious within itself as a portrait by Rembrandt.

Among our Dutch conversation-pieces there is not one which more perfectly illustrates the principle of unity. Besides complete unity of substance it has complete unity of plan. The seated lady, the table and the 'cello make a conchoidal mass, which is completed above by the man tuning his violin. His varied silhouette is enlarged and simplified by that of the

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picture on the wall behind, the loop on the frame marking the remote apex of this central group. Its sweeping lines are stabilized and continued by the uprights of the window and the fireplace, while at the top these verticals are connected by the beams of the ceiling, which make a sort of frame for the subject. And lest these rectangular forms should lead to stiffness, the cunning arrangement of the plates on the mantelshef continues and carries out of the picture the great S-shaped curve of which the man's right arm, the lady's shoulder, skirt and left sleeve are the chief components.

The colour scheme is designed no less compactly and cunningly. The glowing red and white of the seated lady are balanced by the similar colours in the tablecloth. Her orange skirt is echoed by the man's brown dress, and these warm tones are contrasted with just enough passages of darkness in the mirror frame and window curtains, the man's hat and dress, and the carved chair back, as to give them their utmost value. The result is a 'harmony in red' no less solid than it is brilliant. The whole too is full of light, and of a mellow golden atmosphere in complete accord with the note sounding from the violin to which the lady so dreamily listens. Indeed the atmosphere seems rather that of dream or romance than of our common day; for there things look sharper, cooler, brighter—and perhaps a trifle more prosaic. If we compare *The Duet* either with Metsu's *Music Lesson* (839) or with Vermeer's *Lady standing at the Virginals* (1383), we shall see the difference at once. To carry the

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comparison further would be unjust, for each in its way approaches perfection.

In point of vivacity *The Music Lesson* challenges and perhaps surpasses *The Duet*. In the latter we have a scheme of brilliant red and white carried through the picture. In the *Music Lesson* the scheme is more complex. Black, white and grey, red, blue and buff colour are the elements which delight us by their lively interchange. The strongest contrast perhaps is that between the man's blue hose and the wonderful scarlet table-cloth. Yet the quieter passages are no less enchanting. What could be finer, for example, than the tone of the Ruysdael which hangs behind in its black frame, to which the grey wall and the gilding of the larger frame to the left make so appropriate a contrast? The planning is no less subtle and felicitous than that of *The Duet*, and may be analysed in the same way by those interested in pictorial architecture. It may be noticed that the components are more numerous and less simple than before, so that even greater reliance is made upon rectangular forms (e.g. the virginals and the picture frames) to give repose and stability to the design. But our more pressing concern is with the atmosphere of the piece. In *The Duet* the figures and background are harmonized by an imaginary atmosphere, a delicate mist, which renders it a comparatively simple matter to show which things are near and which are farther off. All painters of interiors with figures know the convenience of this pictorial atmosphere. It is a tradition of their craft, and is so generally employed that the spectator is not usually



GABRIEL METSU  
THE DUET





GABRIEL METSU  
THE MUSIC LESSON

## TERBORCH AND METSU

conscious of its presence, even when it is used so openly as to look like a brown fog. Only when such pictures are seen side by side with works which really aim at imitating the effects of cool luminous daylight, is their pictorial atmosphere shown to be an agreeable convention. In the seventeenth century Metsu was the first artist who saw this important fact. His essays in a more exact realism precede by a few years those of De Hooch and Vermeer, and though these two masters for a while did consistently what Metsu did occasionally, the credit of being first in the field belongs to him.

In our *Music Lesson* the room is no longer filled with a delicate mist, but with clear cool luminous air, and it is only by the most refined adjustment of tones and edges that the distance, some three or four feet at the most, which separates the figures from the wall behind is so perfectly suggested. The necessity for this adjustment has compelled the painter to work with more care than was his wont. The fluency and force of brushwork which delight us in *The Duet* and *The Drowsy Landlady* could not be used when the exact matching of tones and textures was essential to verisimilitude. In consequence the workmanship is more smooth and the effect a little harder than usual. Yet all who are not devotees of painting pure and simple, will probably think the sacrifice was worth while, so fresh, so natural and so vivid is the result. Indeed, in his desire for vivacity Metsu tends to make his flashes of white a little too prominent. De Hooch and Vermeer at their best can keep the whites in their true

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place in the tonal scale without any sacrifice of liveliness. In a few other works, as I have indicated, Metsu carries luminosity further and breadth much further, but whether these or *The Duet* are really finer than *The Music Lesson* must be left to personal taste. The devotee of luminosity will put *The Duet* last; the devotee of brushwork will put it first. *The Music Lesson* occupies an intermediate place, and so may stand as typical generally of Metsu's genius, a genius which at the moment is perhaps a little obscured by more fashionable names.

The fact is that perfect examples of all the best Dutch painters of cabinet pictures are exceedingly rare. The least accidental damage to the surface, an injudicious varnishing, the least carelessness or clumsiness on the part of a cleaner, is sufficient to rob the picture of its pristine freshness, and that freshness once lost can never be regained. The delicate work of men like Metsu and Terborch is particularly liable to damage from these and similar causes. So of the pictures which have come down to us not one in twenty is sufficiently well preserved to show the full extent of their gifts; the remainder rubbed, darkened or repainted, have lost almost all those refinements which once made them valuable. Ever since the days of Ruskin, it has been the fashion in this country to depreciate the Dutch masters in comparison with the Italians. So far as the rank and file of the Dutchmen are concerned, and so far as the damaged works of the greater men are concerned, the depreciation is not unmerited. They are mostly rather dismal stuff. But

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the best works of painters like Metsu stand above all this depreciatory comment. They realize so perfectly the functions of the cabinet picture with its ideal of the open window, that though several hundred thousand cabinet pictures have been produced since their day, these masters of the seventeenth century still remain as unrivalled in their own chosen field as do the brothers Van Eyck.

## CHAPTER VIII

## DE HOOCH AND VERMEER

OF the two painters whose names we associate with the complete mastery of daylight effects, Pieter de Hooch was the elder by some three years. If we may trust the slender evidence which in this case, as in that of so many other Dutch artists, has to take the place of history, he started life as a pupil of Nicolas Berchem. But de Hooch must have been a youth of rare independence of mind, for even in his earliest works we see no trace of the smooth Italian style which Berchem cultivated. On the contrary, as our *Interior of a Stable* (3881) will indicate, de Hooch's beginnings are characteristically Dutch. In spite of the general tone of brown which pervades the picture, we notice that by definite suggestion of sunlight and by clear transparent pigment the young artist already attains a luminous effect, though with rather clumsier brushwork than many of his fellows. He was no precocious genius, being some twenty-five years old when these early works were produced, and living as painter and footman in the house of a rich merchant.

Then in the space of some three years we find a

## DE HOOCH AND VERMEER

marvellous development. The *Courtyard of a Dutch House* (835), of the year 1658, is a complete and vivid masterwork. It is usual to attribute this sudden efflorescence to the influence of de Hooch's fellow townsman, Jan Vermeer of Delft. No doubt the two young artists did to some extent make common cause in their artistic explorations. But as we have seen, Metsu, working at Leyden only a few miles away, had by the year 1656 mastered the art of painting daylight, so that it is almost certainly to him that both these Delft artists turned for technical inspiration. Indeed the vivid red and white of this *Courtyard* are in substance, pitch and vigour exactly what we should expect in a painter fresh from studying Metsu. For the daring of the design, for the capricious use of geometrical forms (note in particular the Z shape made by the trellis and the broom), we must look elsewhere. And we need not look far. We find an exactly similar geometrical caprice in another Delft picture, dated 1652, which now hangs on the same wall as the works by de Hooch.

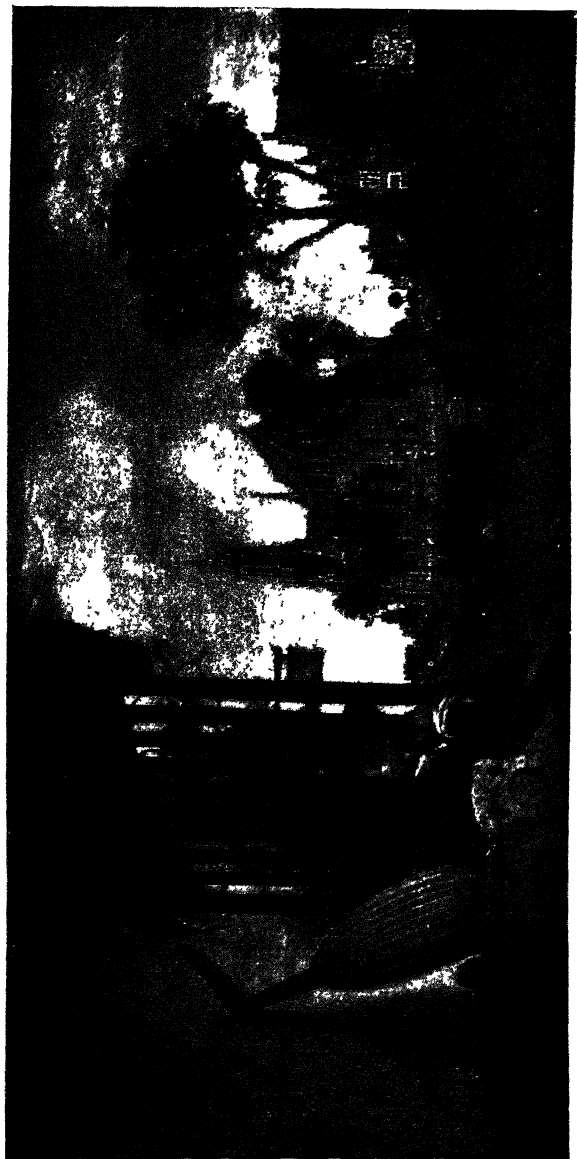
The tiny painting of *A View in Delft* (3714), by Carel FABRITIUS, is one of the most precious of existing documents for elucidating the growth of painting in Delft. Fabritius, the phoenix who rose again, in the person of his pupil Jan Vermeer, from the ashes of the Delft explosion of 1654, is a fascinating personage—largely perhaps because we know so little about him. A pupil of Rembrandt, his extant indubitable works are hardly more numerous than Giorgione's, and show an equal ardour for experiment. To escape

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from the current formulae of design and lighting and subject matter appears to have been his invariable purpose, so that his untimely death in the explosion, which Van der Poel (1061) and others have recorded for us, was perhaps the greatest loss sustained by artistic Holland. Had he lived he might have initiated a general widening of the Northern painter's outlook, similar to that effected by Giorgione in Venice. As it is, his pupil Vermeer and one or two others did enough, under the influence of his experiments, during the twenty years which followed his death, to make the Delft painting of this time the most remarkable achievement of the whole Dutch School, Rembrandt, of course, excepted.

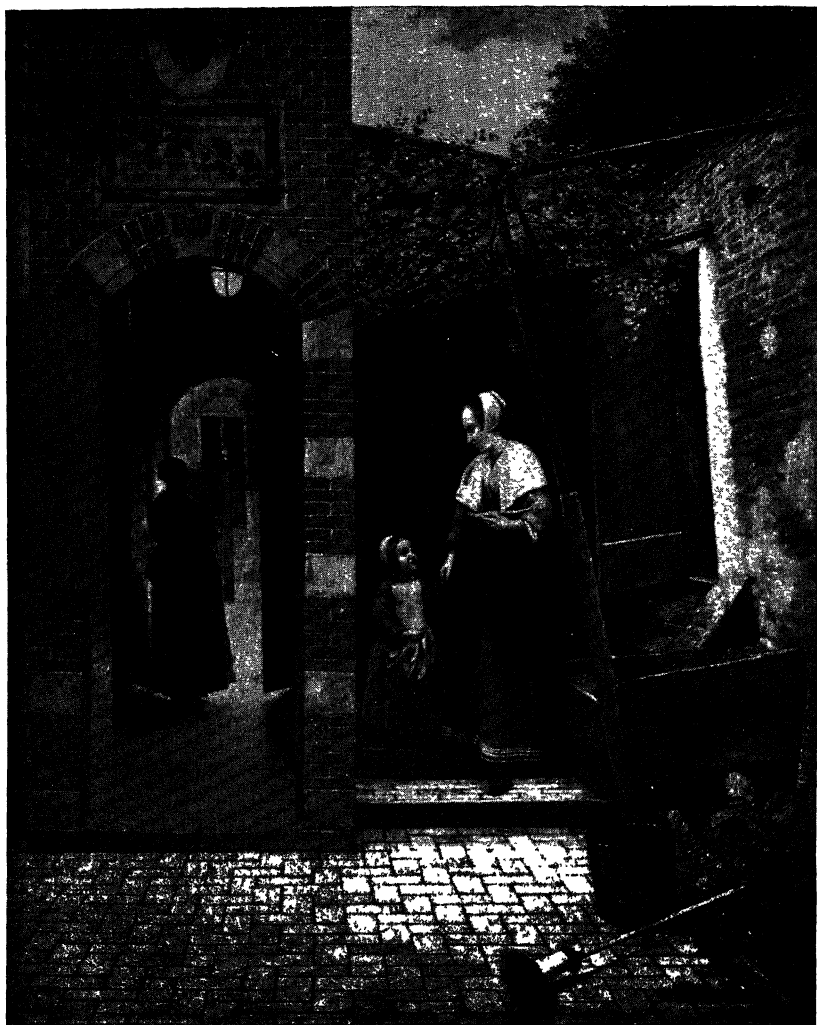
Experimental alike in the novelty of its design and its minute treatment, our *View in Delft* (3714) aims at blending perfect realism of daylight effect with a disposition of spaces and sharp accents (like the pattern of the trellis) which is wholly novel. The use of the curve of the canal bridge is no less audacious and unexpected. When we recall the simple system on which Dutch landscape had hitherto been planned, an adaptation of the oval compositions favoured by Claude to the long level horizons of Holland, the departure made by Fabritius is so abrupt that we are bound to look for some external impulse which could drive him to a conception so unusual.

Was it a mere coincidence that at this very time, 1650, the pottery which was the great industry of Delft, suddenly changed its character? Till the year 1645, the designs on Delft ware had been exclusively



KAREL FABRITIUS : VIEW IN DELFT





DE HOOCH  
COURTYARD OF A DUTCH HOUSE (835)

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national, but the importation of Chinese porcelain by the Dutch East India Company had begun to compete seriously with the native industry. Then one Aelbrecht de Keizer, who had entered the Delft Guild of St. Luke in 1642, set about imitating the decoration and modelling of the Chinese pieces, and with such success that in a very few years the Delft ware in the Oriental style became widely famous. It was inevitable that Fabritius at Delft, and a member of the Guild of St. Luke, should come into close contact with the leading potters and with the Oriental art which they were then studying so closely. It was natural, too, that his eager experimental temper should at once seize upon the daring caprices of Oriental design, and try to put them to use, just as Degas and Whistler and the Paris 'Impressionists' of the seventies used the motives they discovered in Japanese prints. Indeed, this little group of Delft artists time after time remind us very strongly of the Parisian group of fifty years ago. But there is one difference between them. When the Delft painters had done their work the secret of their inspiration died with them. The Oriental influence which came to Paris remains, thanks perhaps to the critics, as an established and accepted extension of our Western ideas about design. So when we look at our little Fabritius, we may fairly think of it as a primitive effort at blending the solidity and caprice of a Degas with the luminous science of a Claude Monet.

Returning now to de Hooch and his *Courtyard* (835), we need no longer wonder why the painter's design should suddenly become so novel, his tonality so vivid,

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the total effect so entirely modern. We might indeed give it a Whistlerian title, and call it a 'Harmony in Red and White,' so completely does it rely upon these two notes for its lively rhythm. The red is concentrated on the shutter to the left, and passes thence through the enchantingly painted brickwork to the wall on the right. There the plaster makes the chief mass of white, which passes across to the left, being seen at its strongest where the white cap of the woman contrasts with the shadow under the trellis. Her blue-grey skirt and the orange of the little girl's dress bring the strongest colour contrast to the same neighbourhood, a concentration of emphasis which is needed when the pitch of tone and pattern of forms are so vivacious.

And for the first time in Dutch art history we find a picture that is not painted on a system—that is not obviously built up on a monochrome foundation by a series of traditional processes, with a sequence of ordered shapely touches to which form and texture have in some degree to submit. On the contrary much of the painting is improvised in modern fashion, form and texture being rendered by crumbling pigment, unsystematized and infinitely various, much as Chardin and Constable in later times rendered them. Though here, as we might expect with a Dutchman, the pigment is thin, and the touch so delicate that to appreciate the parallel we may need a magnifying glass. The picture is absolutely 'true to nature'—so perfect in its adjustment to the tones of sober daylight that we might almost take it, but for its sparkle and vivacity, to be a miraculous colour photograph. Nature indeed has

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never been represented more perfectly. By comparison the Pre-Raphaelites would appear a little false or feverish, and all other modern realism is harsh or clumsy.

It will be noticed that in this picture the figures, while caught by the artist in wholly natural poses, are doing nothing in particular. So when we come to the *Interior of a Dutch House* (834), another masterpiece, there is no story to be told. The lady holds up a glass of wine, one gentleman admires the glitter of light in the amber liquid, a second mimics violin-playing with two pipe-stems, the servant is wrapped up in her own thoughts. We are far, very far, away from the unifying romantic mood of Metsu's *Duet*; farther still from the humorous story-telling of Jan Steen and Teniers and Brouwer. Here art has become almost wholly objective, concerned merely with vivid presentation, and interested hardly at all in the persons or the things presented, except in so far as they are seen with the most perfect clearness, and in one of those supremely fortunate moments when some happy concurrence of light and shadow, some flash of colour or sunshine, may endow with sudden beauty things which will revert to their native prosiness so soon as the magic instant is over.

Here we have the ideal of the open window actually attained, and with its perfect attainment we are so well satisfied that we do not ask for any story-telling, any suggestion of romance or drama, not even for pretty faces to enhance our delight. It is enough that we can look into this airy room, so justly proportioned

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to the figures within it, and enjoy the play of light on white walls and patterned floor and gay dresses. The vigorous pitch of the colouring is settled once for all by the white and black and red worn by the woman ; its splendour centres upon the buff and orange of the seated figure, and on the gorgeous blue and crimson plumes of his hat. Yet none of these tones are strident ; all are blended and modified by light, which breaks in upon them and is reflected from the tiled floor right up to the rafters, so naturally that we are compelled to imagine ourselves as actually present in that stately room, and sensible of that cool and stimulating air.

Of the masterly design it is needless to speak. Its general principles will be found similar to those of Metsu's *Duet*, except that the whites now take their proper place in the scheme, but the elements of the composition seem to be combined not by artifice but by some felicitous instinct. Here, as in de Hooch's earlier picture, the pigment by its very thinness and transparency suggests the light which is pulsating through the room. The film of paint is indeed so thin that in more than one place (notably in the maid's skirt), it has become translucent with time and we can see a previous painting quite plainly through it. But where special brightness is called for, as on the face of the seated gentlemen, we find spots and dots of more solid pigment applied much as a modern would apply them, but less heavily. Technically in fact the picture has more in common with de Hooch's youthful *Interior of a Stable*, than with the *Courtyard* of 1658, so that it may just possibly be the earlier of the



DE HOOCH  
INTERIOR OF A DUTCH HOUSE



DE HOOCH  
COURTYARD OF A DUTCH HOUSE (794)

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two pictures from the Peel Collection. In that case the painter's transition from studentship to complete mastery was indeed abrupt.

Seven years after the Peel *Courtyard*, in 1665, de Hooch painted the *Courtyard of a Dutch House* (794). Once more we must admire the large arabesque of the design with its effect of open daylight, obtained by getting the exact pitch of the red tiles and woodwork against the sky, and absolute truth in the corresponding tones below. There the black velvet jacket, white hood and white fur of the standing lady combine to form the key-note of the picture, and are pleasantly echoed by the white, grey and black of the wall and pump and kneeling maid-servant. The white wall indicates how during these seven years the desire for texture had grown upon de Hooch. Elsewhere we observe that the touch is less delicate, the pigment more turbid than in the earlier pictures, though by sheer accurate notation of tone-values the piece still remains wonderfully luminous. The greens on the leaves appear to have lost their freshness from the fading of some unstable colour. Perhaps the greens in the earlier *Courtyard* (835) may also once have been stronger. That at least is what we should expect in a picture where everything else is presented with so much vigour and truth.

During the last years of his life, in the wealthier society of Amsterdam, de Hooch lost much of his craftsmanship and almost all his sincerity. *La Collation* (3047) from the Steengracht Collection will illustrate this decline. His sense of design has vanished, so has



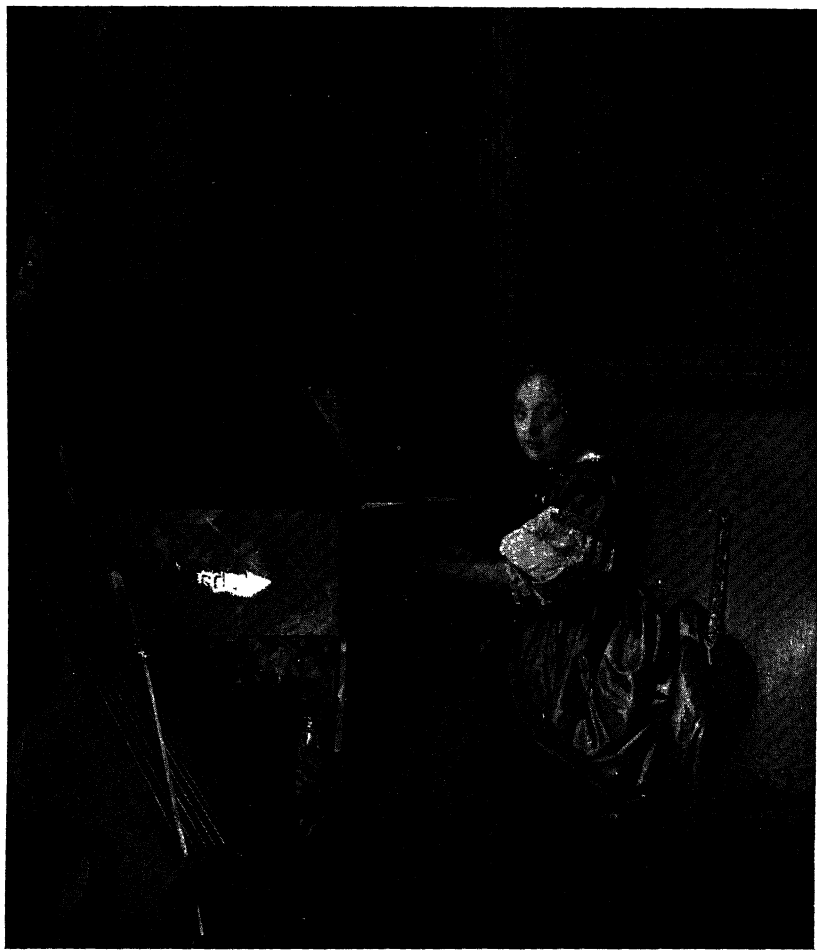
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his feeling for atmospheric tone. The left half of the picture is made impossibly black to give relief to the sunshine seen through the gateway. The group of figures in this semi-darkness is more fashionably dressed than the Delft groups of his middle life, but it is ill-drawn and wretchedly painted. Only in the standing figure to the right, and in the sunlit street beyond, do we see some traces of what twenty years earlier had been one of the most remarkable talents in all Holland.

Yet to-day this great talent is challenged and overshadowed by that of his fellow-citizen, Jan VERMEER of Delft. Though we have no proof that Vermeer from his birth in 1632 to his death in 1675 ever left Delft, his earliest pictures show a certain connexion with Rembrandt and a very direct influence from Italy. The former characteristic may be attributed to his reputed pupilage under Fabritius; the source of the latter still remains unknown. His earliest dated picture, the *Courtesan*, at Dresden, proves that in 1656 the broad lighting, strong colour and solid pigment of the Italians were even more in his mind than the dramatic effects of light and shade beloved of Rembrandt's following. Our *Card Players* (1247) is the nearest parallel in scale which we possess to the *Courtesan*, and no doubt the same logic which impelled Maes thereafter to reduce the size of his pictures operated in the case of Vermeer, whose most marked personal trait was a passion for order and proportion. The famous *View of Delft* at The Hague is smaller by one third than the *Courtesan*, and only once



JAN VERMEER : VIEW OF DELFT



JAN VERMEER  
LADY SEATED AT THE VIRGINALS

## DE HOOCH AND VERMEER

in after life, namely in *The Painter* (Czernin Gallery, Vienna) does he again employ the 50 in. × 40 in. scale. That picture, we may note, was unsold and in his widow's possession after his death. The period of transition is marked by such works as the *Girl Asleep* in the Altman Collection, of moderate size but warm and brown in general tone, and by the *Street in Delft* which passed from the Six Collection to the Rijksmuseum after fetching the sensational price of £80,000. The *Girl reading a Letter* at Dresden reveals the Vermeer with whom we are familiar, though a worker still in comparatively low tones. These in the past led to the idea that it was painted by Rembrandt. The *Maid-Servant pouring Milk*, at Amsterdam, opens a new phase, luminous, solid, richly coloured and with a certain monumental grandeur worthy of Carlini or Millet, whom in nicety of observation and execution it surpasses.

Through the series of paintings of which the above are typical examples, Vermeer slowly felt his way to his unique blending of natural daylight effects with a taste in design no less daring than fastidious. If de Hooch was the forerunner in the matter of lighting; if at his best he shows an extraordinary natural faculty for grouping people and things in the most effective way, he too often fell far below his highest level. The subtle science of Vermeer, when at last he had learned its laws, is far more consistent. Amongst the thirty-six or thirty-seven works which are generally accepted as his, I can recall only one which is quite without interest, and there the technique is so clumsy that I

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believe the picture will in time be added to the small group of Vermeer imitations. The normal work of the painter's maturity is a fascinating compound of knowledge, good taste, certainty of hand and audacity.

Knowledge deserves the first place, because Vermeer's genius is no hit-or-miss talent, but a faculty in which logic and deliberate structural science must clearly have been at work from start to finish. Good taste is a quite inadequate term for the scholarly discrimination shown by Vermeer in choosing his subject matter, for his almost austere rejection of all that does not make for the completeness of his design, and for the genius whereby he preserves the balance between undue elaboration and those last refinements of contour and colour without which any picture must be hard, empty, unconvincing. His certainty of hand, especially in treating things inanimate or at rest, coupled with a technique of singular breadth and a simplicity much more apparent than real, renders the actual substance of his pictures a delight to the amateur and a marvel to the professional artist. We can guess how Brouwer or Metsu did their work, but the technical secrets of Vermeer like those of John van Eyck remain unfathomable. As to his audacity there can be no question. Is there one characteristic painting by Vermeer which does not in any company stand out from the things round it as something utterly unlike them—something which seems to point the way to quite novel extensions of the art of painting, and which in its power of thrilling us at the very first glance, is almost disquieting? Many painters have sought for this power of arresting

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the attention by audacities of design and colour, but they have done so much in the spirit of the excellent poster designers of our time, and are content when they have compelled us to turn our eyes upon them for a moment. Few, very few indeed, have ever succeeded in adding to this primary challenge the power of continuous fascination, and to that small group Vermeer belongs.

Even when he falls a little short of his highest standard we find that his second best is still extraordinary. Consider, for example, our *Lady seated at the Virginals* (2568), from the Salting Collection, of which it is the custom to speak in terms of mild disparagement or apology. It is undeniably less brilliant than some other works by Vermeer, yet in general truth of tone, in the rendering of real daylight, not some convenient pictorial atmosphere of brown or grey, we see at a glance that no other painting on the same wall, and the wall contains masterpieces by Metsu, Terborch and Jan Steen, can compare with it, saving only Vermeer's other and more vivid picture No. 1383. And the superiority in tone is accompanied by superiority in design. Here we have exactly the right amount of pictorial matter to make a fine picture: were there less the composition might seem empty, were there more it would certainly seem a little crowded, as even Metsu's beautiful *Music Lesson* (839) appears to be when we turn from the one design to the other. With this justice of proportion we have also an evident refinement of personal type, such as even Terborch attains only in his best portraits, accentuated by refine-

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ments of colour and handling peculiar to Vermeer. Of all the Dutch artists he is the one who most closely resembles the religious painters of the early Italian Renaissance in his scrupulous endeavour that all which he does shall be fresh and spotless and serene. That is the secret of the peculiar charm which he exerts. In his presence we are at once exhilarated and purged of all those earthly humours which in some degree obstruct our appreciation of work that is more roughly, more heavily handled. His favourite schemes of colour, wherein a delightful blue and a no less delightful pale yellow are the dominant notes, freshened with silver grey and the most exquisite creamy white, accentuate this vivacious purity.

In our picture the blue and white are concentrated at their strongest in the upper part of the lady's figure, thereby giving just the right accent to her gentle face. The subdued yellow of the skirt contrasts with this blue. The contrast is repeated in the blue and yellow pattern of the curtain, the blue and buff of the landscape on the lid of the virginals, and the blue and brown tones of the body of the instrument, with the light brown wood of the violoncello as a stronger note in the corner. The painting of the edge of the chairback shows this contrast carried out on a scale of extreme minuteness. The passage of grey through the picture may be traced in the same way, from the wall at the back, and the screen or blind which covers the window, to the mottling and marbling upon the virginals. So within our scheme of apparent realism we find everywhere the repetition of a few selected colours, distributed and contrasted

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with the intricate skill of a Japanese colour printer. Knowing as we do the influence which Oriental works of art were having upon Delft at the time when these pictures were produced, we can hardly be in doubt as to the source from which this inspiration came to Vermeer : indeed in his constant preference for schemes of blue and white, we might fancy that we see a reflection of the delight which Chinese porcelain must have caused when European artists first set eyes upon it.

We might further imagine that from the sight of Chinese porcelain Vermeer conceived not only the general idea of setting figures in blue upon a white ground, but also the ambition of substituting for the warm translucent paint and varnish inherited from Van Eyck, and in current use all over Europe, those surfaces of cool creamy enamel which, after many experiments and with incessant application, he was able in his full maturity to produce. This magical technique in which smoothness, for once, is not feebleness, but is an essential factor in securing the exact adjustment of each tone to its neighbour, still defies our analysis. Certain things we may see, a few more we may guess, of the rest we are wholly ignorant. In this picture, for example, we can see that the flesh tones at least were laid in with *terre-verte* in the Italian manner, much as Duccio or Michelangelo might have laid them in. We can see too very clearly how the final high lights were applied ; sometimes with liquid dots of solid paint, sometimes with crisp square touches, each most delightfully vivacious. Of the intermediate process we can guess thus much—that the pigments



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were liquid and semi-opaque, each patch being applied neatly to the exact shape required, and fitted exactly to the patches round it. This method, suggestive of inlaid work rather than of painting, can be easily studied in the marbling of the harpsichord and the picture which hangs on the wall to the right. What is really puzzling is the way in which these components were often fused without any trace of brushwork remaining. By this fusion Vermeer prevents any casual grooving or roughness of pigment from interfering with the natural gradation of his light. His tones meet whether sharply or gently with the exact definition of nature, and with a surface so even that the effect remains quite unaltered however the lighting of the picture may be changed.

It is almost incredible that colour could have been deposited thus by any process of brushwork known to us, especially where a picture was in hand for whole weeks or months, and each day's work would involve such an adjustment of new paint to old as would be sure to leave traces here and there. Is it possible that Vermeer employed some process of smoothing or polishing the surface while the work was approaching completion? These processes were of course employed in other forms of painting, such as coach painting, where exceptional evenness of surface was required. Then when this smoothing was completed to the painter's satisfaction, the addition of the sparkling accents on dress and jewellery would, in the hands of one so skilled as Vermeer, be enough to restore vitality to the work. Notice, for example, how the firm stroke with which the bow of the violoncello is painted tells

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upon the softer passages around it. The professional sign-writer acquires something like this firmness of touch : we might even think that Vermeer depended upon a ruler, were it not the same firmness appears where a ruler would be useless ; the bridge of the violoncello will serve for evidence.

Yet with all these merits the painting is not one of the master's *chefs-d'œuvre*. Some parts of the work are less carefully observed than usual ; the folds of the satin skirt are not wholly convincing, the patterned curtain to the left is a little coarse, the face of the young lady is a little too smooth and insipid. These defects are small in themselves, and noticeable only because they occur in the work of one from whom we ask nothing short of perfection. I believe that much the most serious fault occurs in the lighting of the piece. The grey space behind the instrument was surely intended to be a window, from which the face of the seated girl was once illuminated ? But for some reason or other, this window has been blocked out, and the blind or screen which takes its place shuts off all the light. The instrument is thus set in a particularly dark place where the player can neither see the keys nor read her music. Pictorially of course this would not matter much, but the darkening of the window appears also to cut us off from the chance of escape into the light and air outside. We feel constrained and confined as we look into that gloomy little corner, and all the brightness which Vermeer has lavished upon the remaining parts of the picture does not remove our instinctive dejection.

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How different is the impression we derive from the *Lady standing at the Virginals* (1383) ! Here, though the actual space represented is no larger than in the former picture, every inch of it is so magically protracted by the circumambient light and air that it seems an infinity. There is a matutinal freshness in that cool radiant atmosphere, something heroic in the sweep of those large rectangular forms, something monumental about that self-contained young lady, which in their combination are unique. We might turn for certain of these elements to Piero della Francesca, for others we should have to extend our inquiry as far as Japan, and I cannot help recalling how when a famous Japanese guest of the nation was recently being taken round the Gallery, his eyes, weary with official sight-seeing, happened to light upon this picture. He gave a perceptible start, stopped, and was more delighted by it than by all the other treasures of Trafalgar Square. Indeed the balance of colours and masses here is no less complete and audacious than it is with the greatest Japanese designers, but the problems of solidity, of recession and of airy realism which Vermeer triumphantly solves are problems with which no Oriental ever troubled his head.

The work is thus complete in two different ways—as a pattern and as a three-dimensional composition. Once more blue is the dominant note, passing from the chair to the blue silk bodice, and thence to the picture in a gilt frame. It is echoed by the landscapes of the Cupid and on the lid of the instrument, by the legs of the virginals and by the blue Delft tiles along

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the floor. The yellow greys of the window frame, of the lady's skirt, of the chair-back, of the virginals-landscape and the painted Cupid, are abruptly crowned and concentrated by the vivid gold of the frame high on the wall to the left. This gilt-framed picture is the keystone of the design, its powerful colour providing just the proper counterpoise to the larger masses on the right. Take it away, or subdue it in tone, and the composition falls to pieces at once. Note also how the black marble criss-cross on the floor and the black frame above give emphasis and vivacity to a sequence of tones which might otherwise from their very moderation be just a little ineffective.

Here too we can fairly judge the refinement of craftsmanship to which Vermeer attained—that mastery of tones, and in particular of contours, whereby he could present solid forms in perfect relation to a background without any of those devices of blurring or forced relief to which we poor ordinary painters are driven by our incompetence. Look for example at the lady's head set against the picture in a black frame, and notice how the head, though quite thinly painted, keeps its place some six or eight feet in front of that heavy piece of furniture. Yet to obtain this projection Vermeer has made no concessions. The edge of the picture frame has just the degree of sharpness which it would have in nature, and what an edge it is! Without the least tremor of hand, without the least trace of brushwork, the two films of paint representing white wall and black frame come together to form one continuous substance with a precision like that of some

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piece of machine-tooling, and yet with an atmospheric quality which is anything but mechanical. The gifts of other great artists we can understand as examples of ordinary human faculties incredibly heightened and refined. But for the virtuosity of painting like Vermeer's it is difficult to find any parallel, even on a much lower scale of accomplishment. Though it includes apparently the skill of a calligrapher and the unerring certainty of the engineer-draughtsman, it never descends to the flourishing of the one or the rigidity of the other, but applies to each object the method which most perfectly renders its visual quality. The hair and dress of the lady in our picture will suffice to show how flexible the method really is.

And so with this magical process—for we may well call a process magical when it produces marvels, and human experience fails to tell us how—so the cabinet-picture reaches perfection. We may dismiss as a minor accident the slight clarification of the paint in the course of two and a half centuries. It has perhaps a little lowered the general key of the picture, and has certainly left the *terre-verte* foundation of the flesh tones more conspicuous in the shadows than Vermeer intended it to be. As we saw in the case of de Hooch, small changes of this kind are inevitable where the technical methods are so delicate and elaborate as those which perfect realism demands. The main fact is that in the best work of these two painters of Delft our ideal of the open window is attained, and we learn how permanently delightful a transcript of nature may be, whether it is rendered with the vivid homely realism







JAN VERMEER  
LADY STANDING AT THE VIRGINALS





## DE HOOCH AND VERMEER

of de Hooch, or with the cool radiance, the audacious refinement, and the inimitable technique of Jan Vermeer.

The influence of these two great painters upon their fellows in Delft, and upon Dutch art in general, was neither extensive nor lasting. Few indeed could hope to develop powers of vision like those possessed by de Hooch : none could be encouraged by the example of Vermeer to spend their lives over a technical method so elaborate as his. For though Vermeer's pictures commanded a ready sale, at what in those days were exceptional prices, they took so long to paint that the artist was continually in debt.

*The Music Party* (3864) by Jacob OCHTERVELT is an interesting attempt to obtain results like Vermeer's in a less laborious way. Ochtervelt, a fellow pupil of de Hooch under Nicolas Berchem and a painter of considerable ability, here adopts Vermeer's practice of setting his musicians against a white wall, and using the horizontals of the instrument, of the hanging map, and the lintel of the door to make up a pattern in Vermeer's manner. The colour is admirably planned. The lady seated to the left and beating time is not more charming in face and gesture than is the subtle combination of blue and grey and crimson on her bodice (the very chord of colour used by Piero della Francesca in his *Nativity*), or the yellow quilted skirt with the fine lawn apron falling over it. The delicate painting of the panels of the instrument also merits notice, as does the blonde head of the lady in rose red satin, the same gown which is worn by a taller and darker model

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in our *Lady standing at a Spinnet* (2143).<sup>1</sup> Yet when we compare this able painting with the standard set by Vermeer, the ordeal proves too severe. Ochtervelt's light has not Vermeer's radiant clarity; it is broken up by unexplained shadows and looks a little dull. Nor does the actual placing of the figures in the room carry instant conviction. The standing lady is solid enough; she is perhaps a little too solid for the others. She seems to project herself to the very front of the picture, and all else, except the ebony inlay of the instrument and the larger dog, is reduced to vagueness. The gentleman to the left, for example, is by comparison a mere phantom without weight or substance.

Another most interesting picture, the *Fishmarket* (3682) by Emanuel de WITTE, points the same moral, namely that realism is an exacting taskmaster. De Witte is well-known as an admirable painter of church interiors. But on a few occasions he experimented with outdoor subjects, and our picture illustrates the power and originality with which these experiments were conducted.<sup>2</sup> The thing in some ways is curiously modern. The strong diagonals of the fish

<sup>1</sup> This picture was damaged during the war. When it came to be repaired (a task which Mr. Holder performed with wonderful success), the delicate atmospheric effect of the lady's head was seen to be due to the minute 'pointillism' with which it was executed; a remarkable evidence of the technical resource of one who is usually counted among the minor Dutch painters. Ochtervelt's best works deserve a higher place than is commonly given to them.

<sup>2</sup> A still finer painting, indeed it is one of the most striking products of the whole Dutch School, is the *Fishmarket*, in the Boymans Museum at Rotterdam.



JACOB OCHTERVELT  
THE MUSIC PARTY



EMANUEL DE WITTE

FISHMARKET

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stall, with the sunlit group seen behind them, are exactly what we might find in modern French paintings of the Seventies, when the influence of Japan was being blended with the rising desire for *plein air*. Something of this fashion of design survives in Degas; the unduly depreciated paintings of Tissot provide perhaps a more exact analogy. The vivid and attractive figures to the right, in strong sunlight, are clearly done in rivalry with Vermeer. The magnificent figure of the portly housewife and her charming little girl recall Jan Steen in his grandest moments. The blue sky and swelling white sails behind her have a freshness and movement which does not recur in art before the time of Constable. And for sheer virtuosity look at the painting of the shiny slippery fish, which transforms even the writhing eel into a thing of delight.

With such excellences of conception, of handiwork, and of original observation the picture would deserve to be classed with the best works of de Hooch (to whom it was for long attributed) and of Vermeer, but for one curious error. The blackness of the shadow under the awning is perhaps excessive, yet it could have been pardoned had the shadow fallen consistently. But it does not. The girl selling fish right under this dark awning is painted as if she were standing in broad daylight, and the falsity of the tone in this conspicuous passage deprives the total effect at once of truth and of breadth. It may seem hypercritical to deal so hardly with a work which is no less original than it is excellent, but strictness in these matters is really

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essential, if we are to distinguish between perfect work and that which is less perfect.

All realistic pictures must depend for their permanent charm upon the rendering of effects of light. If that be perfectly done the nature of the subject matter, of the things which we see through our open window, matters comparatively little. So from de Hooch and Vermeer, who completely mastered this luminous realism, we may look back upon a considerable group of other workers in the same field, whose painting is usually precious in the exact ratio in which it approximates to that of these two men of Delft. Yet the greatest of all Dutchmen, Rembrandt, followed a different ideal. With him and that ideal we must now concern ourselves, merely noting that the impulse which has driven the moderns to pursue the painting of light with so much science and devotion, is thoroughly justified by the example of their Dutch fore-runners, from whom indeed I think we have still something to learn in the matter of fitting our luminism to the every-day wants of the average modern house.

## CHAPTER IX

### REMBRANDT

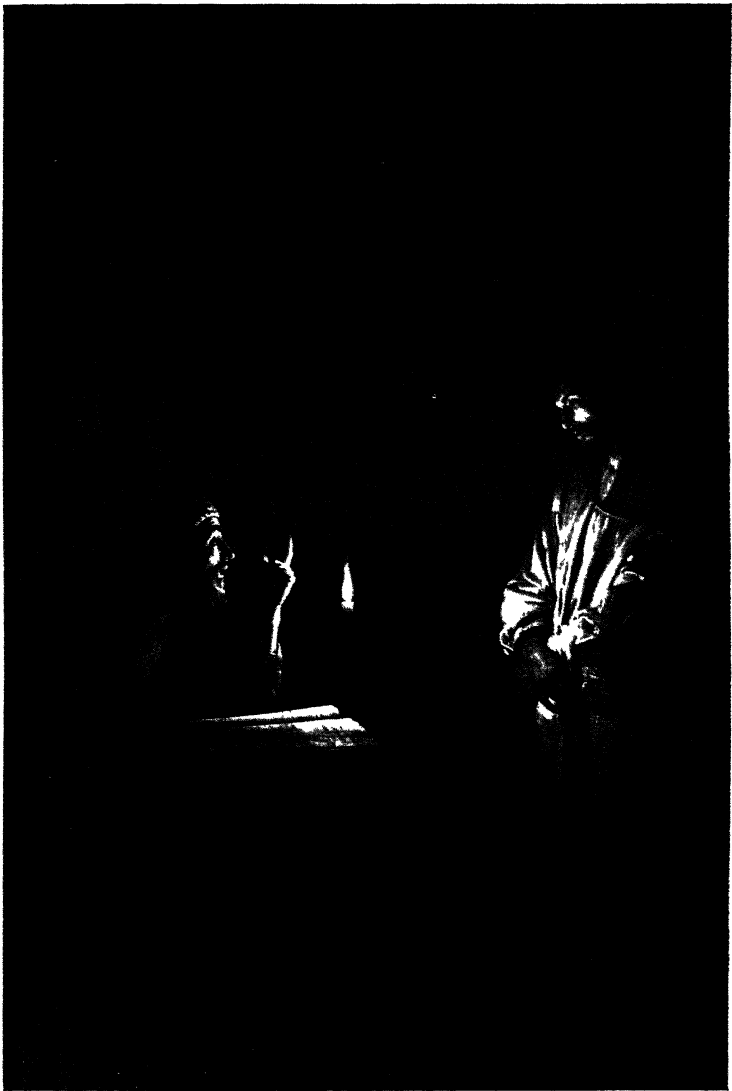
WHILE the essentially practical talent of Holland was thus slowly solving the problem of the cabinet picture, an independent genius, destined in time to become the supreme glory of the Dutch nation, was working out his salvation upon wholly different lines. A group of Dutch painters at the beginning of the seventeenth century were striving to employ the native taste and the native technical methods upon imaginative compositions, mostly religious, similar to those by which the contemporary Italians, the 'Naturalists' in particular, had achieved fame. Of this fame, one Dutchman at least enjoyed at the time no little share, and the *Christ before Pilate* (3679), by Gerard HONTHORST, remains to-day for proof that 'Gherardo della Notte,' as he was nicknamed, well deserved his youthful reputation. The example of Caravaggio had taught him to make his work effective; but this huge dark picture is more than effective. There is real insight, there is even humour in the character of the judge; the figure of Christ is an inspiration. Dignity, patience, omniscience, all are suggested with a quiet



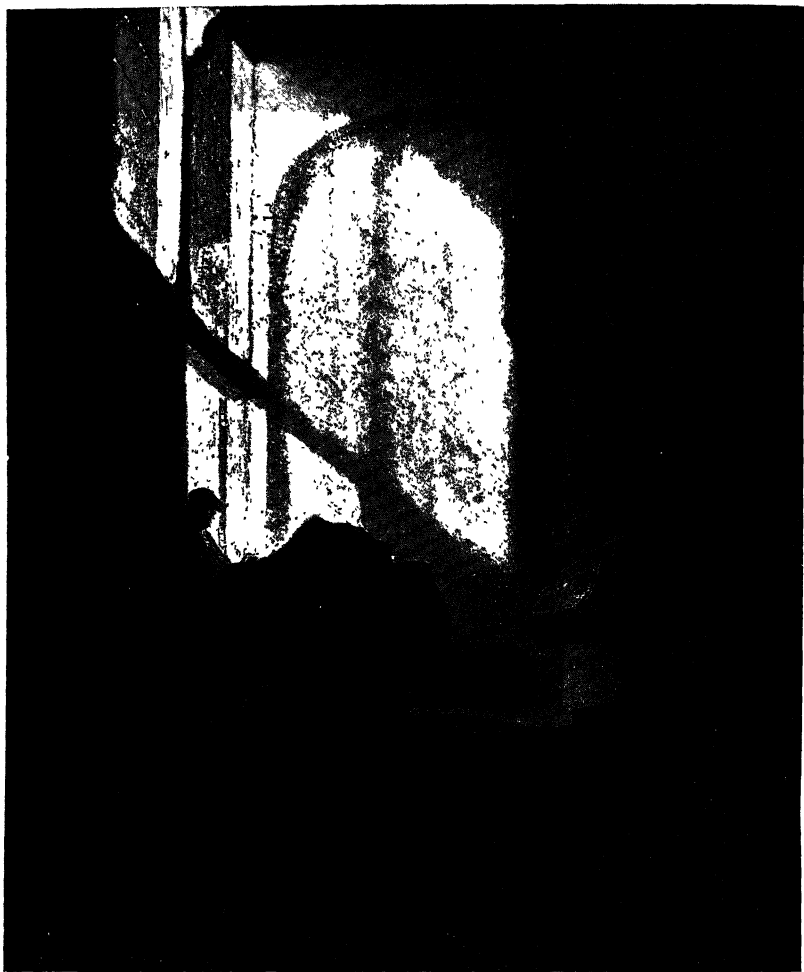
## THE NETHERLANDS

strength which even Titian had not surpassed, and which Rembrandt himself many years later could do no more than rival. The picture is not distinguished by any particular felicity of execution or charm of colour, indeed it is rather a heavy work. Yet we cannot wonder that it made the young painter's reputation, although we may wonder indeed why Honthorst's later achievements were so uniformly mediocre. Here, while Rembrandt was still a child of five or six, Honthorst gives us a masterpiece of psychological insight. Some forty years later, when Rembrandt's art had reached its superb maturity, Honthorst was remembered only as the indifferent court painter and drawing master to the unfortunate Royal Family of Bohemia.

The last few years have witnessed the discovery of quite a little group of Rembrandt's early efforts. Most of these reflect the manner of his second teacher Pieter Lastman, who had been one of the group of Italianising Dutchmen at Rome, in company with Elsheimer, and was well trained according to the eclectic standards of the day. Rembrandt remained with Lastman at Amsterdam only for six months. He then returned home to study for himself. There Lastman's influence gradually gave place to that of Jan Pynas, an Italianiser too, but a far more supple craftsman and a better colourist. Pynas, in fact, deserves to be remembered as the painter upon whom Rembrandt really founded his own style in imaginative composition. The rich warm tone and the dramatic massing of light and shade which we find in so many early works by Rembrandt had been used by Pynas twenty years earlier. But the



GERARD HONTHORST  
CHRIST BEFORE PILATE



REMBRANDT  
THE PHILOSOPHER

## REMBRANDT

older master was content with generalized types; whereas Rembrandt from the first, by incessant practice in portraiture, was developing that mastery of individual character which makes him the most profound interpreter of the human soul who ever handled brush.

For most of his pictorial motives he turned to the Bible, utilizing not only the themes which had satisfied the painters of preceding generations, but discovering as time went on a wealth of new material in places (like the Book of Tobit) which most of his forerunners had overlooked. His main technical preoccupation is the rendering of light, not as the all-pervading medium of de Hooch or Vermeer, but as the sudden vivid illuminant in a place of darkness, revealing the full spiritual or dramatic significance of the figures upon which it falls, and giving full value to the mystery of the shadows around them. Light for Rembrandt was primarily a means of vigorous expression, not as with the painters of Delft a scientific phenomenon to be studied for its own sake.

Yet in *The Philosopher* (3214), the earliest work by Rembrandt which we possess, this latter point of view is by no means overlooked. Indeed we almost forget the ostensible subject of the picture, the philosopher meditating in his lofty room with his books and papers and instruments all about him, in our pleasure at the play of sunlight across the great white wall behind, a pleasure enhanced by the feeling that there is thunder coming. Yet this suggestion of light and atmosphere is only a suggestion, not a representation of nature's tones and colours as we find them represented by de Hooch

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and Vermeer. The whole scene is carried out in monochrome, so that the breadth of the massing is not disturbed by the presence of local colour. In some still earlier works Rembrandt had experimented with colour, not very successfully. A few years later, under the influence of Rubens and Pynas, he resumed his experiments, and steadily worked his way towards a control of colour appropriate to his aims. But at this period, 1629-1630, his painting always inclines strongly to monochrome.

Rembrandt had good reasons for this preference. In the first place it enabled him to work at night as easily as in the day time. Secondly it simplified immensely the problems of design and modelling. Thirdly, monochrome in brown or grey had certain atmospheric and suggestive qualities which were extremely valuable in rendering the type of subject which Rembrandt was making his own. The first of these advantages was precious to one whose industry was so unremitting. All that we know of the young Rembrandt indicates that his life was one of incessant artistic application, in which creative design was practised alternately with searching study from the living model. In time his mind became so well stored with convincing visual images, his hand so well trained to present them, that the greatest demands upon his imagination could be met with confidence.

As it can be carried on by artificial light, painting in monochrome practically doubles the time at an artist's disposal, at least during the winter months. Also it

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reduces immensely the time spent on any single work, for black and white, or brown and white, are naturally much more quickly manipulated than a palette of even five or six colours. And for the study of design monochrome is invaluable. It permits the making of endless experiments and changes in masses and planes and proportions, without getting that confused and muddy effect which comes if we try similar changes when using a full palette. A wash drawing has none of this flexibility, work in pencil or crayon has very little; but the painter in oil monochrome can improvise or remodel almost as he pleases with his film of simple pigment. Indeed the facilities of oil monochrome are so great that when our present absorption in problems of light and colour has run its natural course they may one day be rediscovered.

And oil monochrome has certain expressive qualities of its own which are by no means contemptible. From its easy manipulation the young artist may acquire, as Rembrandt acquired, a sense of the value of brushwork, of the emphatic handling of paint which gives force or fluency or repose exactly where the picture needs them. Those magnificent sculpturesque effects which Rembrandt attains time after time in his mature painting—the craggy loading of pigment on the saliences, the transparency in the recesses—could never have been compassed by one who had not served an apprenticeship in studying pure form, undistracted by the complexities which colour at once introduces. Monochrome again of necessity makes for harmony of atmospheric effect. It is practically impossible to fail of such unity

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with it except when the tones are conspicuously false. And this atmospheric effect will have a mood of its own; the most typical perhaps being that feeling of space, of gravity, of menace even, which the cool grey tones produced by a mixture of black and white will automatically convey.

We must remember too that oil monochrome suggests but does not represent. It can never be more than a somewhat remote echo of nature, but there are times when the remoter echo makes the finest music. This is particularly true when art has to deal with the supernatural. The more we endow the supernatural with substance and solidity the less satisfactory the result may become. When we see such a subject as the Assumption of the Virgin, or the Ascension, represented by some great artist like Titian, we may admire the painter's skill but the picture carries with it no abiding conviction. The figure in the sky has so much evident bulk and weight that the clouds are no support for it. The visionary quality which the picture ought to possess is thus much impaired, if it be not totally lost. But in monochrome both the clouds and figure will be made of the same substance. They combine in harmony with each other and with the things and people round them, so that the imaginative unity of the scene is perfectly preserved. For an imagination like Rembrandt's, which was to be so largely inspired by the miraculous element in religion, no other method could have been so appropriate as monochrome, quite apart from its fitness for the other aspects of his art in which force of characterization,

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concentrated emphasis of design, and gravity of purpose were the essentials. The spiritual side of Rembrandt was still in embryo when *The Philosopher* left his easel, yet, as this digression may perhaps have indicated, the little picture is no inapt illustration of the material and technical principles underlying his subsequent triumphs.

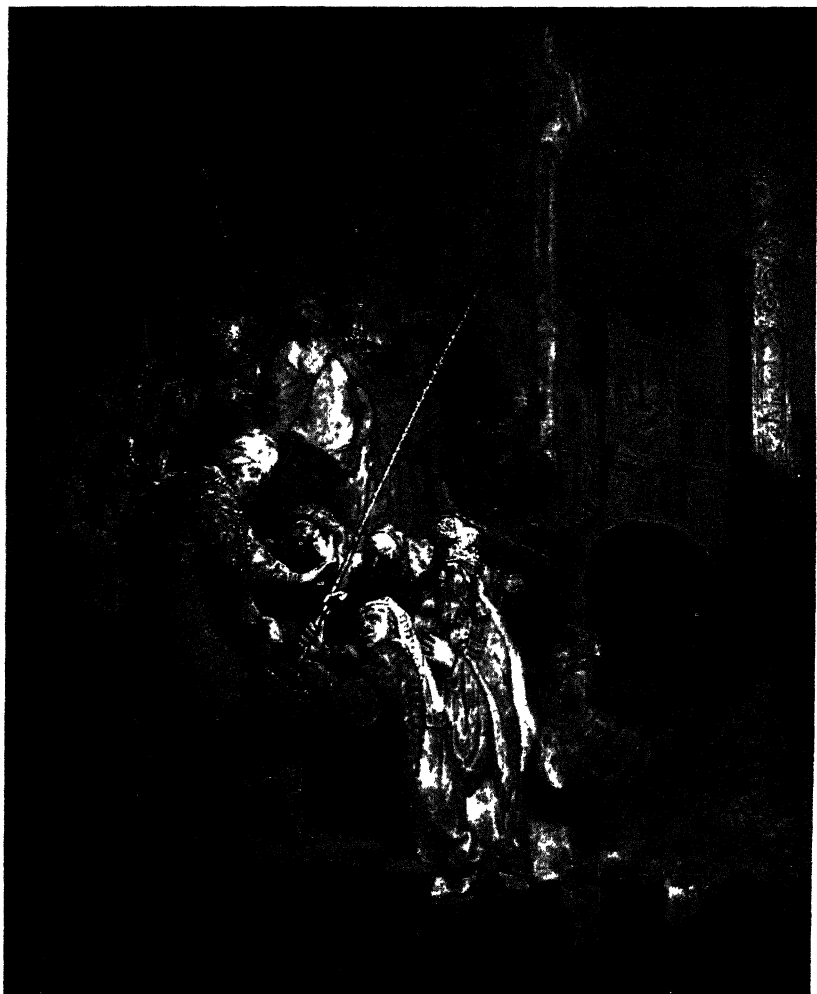
*Christ before Pilate* (1400) will illustrate the next phase of Rembrandt's growth. Here instead of the quiet and solitude of *The Philosopher* we are brought face to face with crowds and turbulence; instead of a single figure, hardly to be distinguished at first from the furniture of the room, we see a multitude inflamed by passion. Merely noting once more how the brown monochrome knits together the varied elements of the design into a harmonious unity, and how the upward sweep of the group to the left is balanced by the arch to the right, and stabilized by the firm verticals of the architecture, we may pass to the characterization of the actors in this drama. The group pressing in upon the embarrassed but not unkindly Pilate is eloquent of human fury, bigotry, stupidity and brutality, while the cruel cunning in the face of the man to the right as he waves back the crowd with his hand, is evil itself personified. Great artists before and since have often handled such subjects with splendid power, but when they have done fair justice to the protagonists, they have been content to let the rest of the figures be types rather than individuals (as in Honthorst's big picture), or if individuals to represent them as more or less



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indifferent to the main action. The 'impersonal' spectators of Piero della Francesca, or the contemporary Venetians with whom Veronese fills the vacant parts of his large canvases, will serve as examples. Rembrandt's imagination, like Shakespeare's, was not satisfied until his scenes were furnished with real people, each with his own particular capacity and temperament and outlook upon life, and until these separate personalities were affected, as they would be in life, by the events in which they were taking part. This psychological interest develops side by side with his technical power. Here it is less profound and sympathetic than in his later time, just as the design itself shows too much obvious artifice, too many stage properties, too much reliance upon the limelight.

This command over human personality did not come to Rembrandt all at once. From his student days at Leyden he had been an incessant painter of portraits, using as models the members of his own household, and himself most frequently of all, with every variety of garb and mood and treatment. By this continual exercise he developed in a few years an insight into human character which was a perfect foundation for his imaginative designs, and an experience of the practical part of portrait painting which rapidly brought him reputation and success. Our portrait of *Françoise van Wasserhoven* (775), painted in 1634 when Rembrandt was twenty-eight, indicates that he could challenge even the great Hals in his own domain. The presentment of this apple-cheeked old lady is no less complete than it is vigorous. While the supple



REMBRANDT  
CHRIST BEFORE PILATE



REMBRANDT : FRANÇOISE VAN WASSERHOVEN



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brushwork follows every wrinkle of the face, catches the rheumy glitter of those aged eyes, and marks crisply each fold of the white ruff, these details are merged in a general effect of singular breadth and force. In Rembrandt's customary manner the figure appears to be set directly under the light from a small window, with all the surroundings so much darkened that there is little reflection from them. The shadow on the old lady's ruff which gives relief to her head is almost black in consequence.

We might guess that Van Dyck was in Rembrandt's mind a year later, when the portrait of *Philips Lucasz* (850) was painted, with so much spirit and distinction is that naval commander presented. And we can see that in the well-known *Portrait of Himself* (672), painted in 1640, Rembrandt was recalling Raphael's *Baldassare Castiglione*, which he had seen and sketched in 1639, and perhaps, too, some engraving of our *Ariosto*? (1944) by Titian. But whether his model be Hals or Van Dyck, or Raphael, or Titian, Rembrandt does not surrender his own monochromatic simplicity. A golden flesh tone, with white, black, and perhaps some touch of quiet green or plum-colour or rich crimson in the draperies, make a sufficient palette for him, and leave him free to devote his genius to marking the exact play and incidence of light upon his subjects with no risk of losing crispness and vivacity.

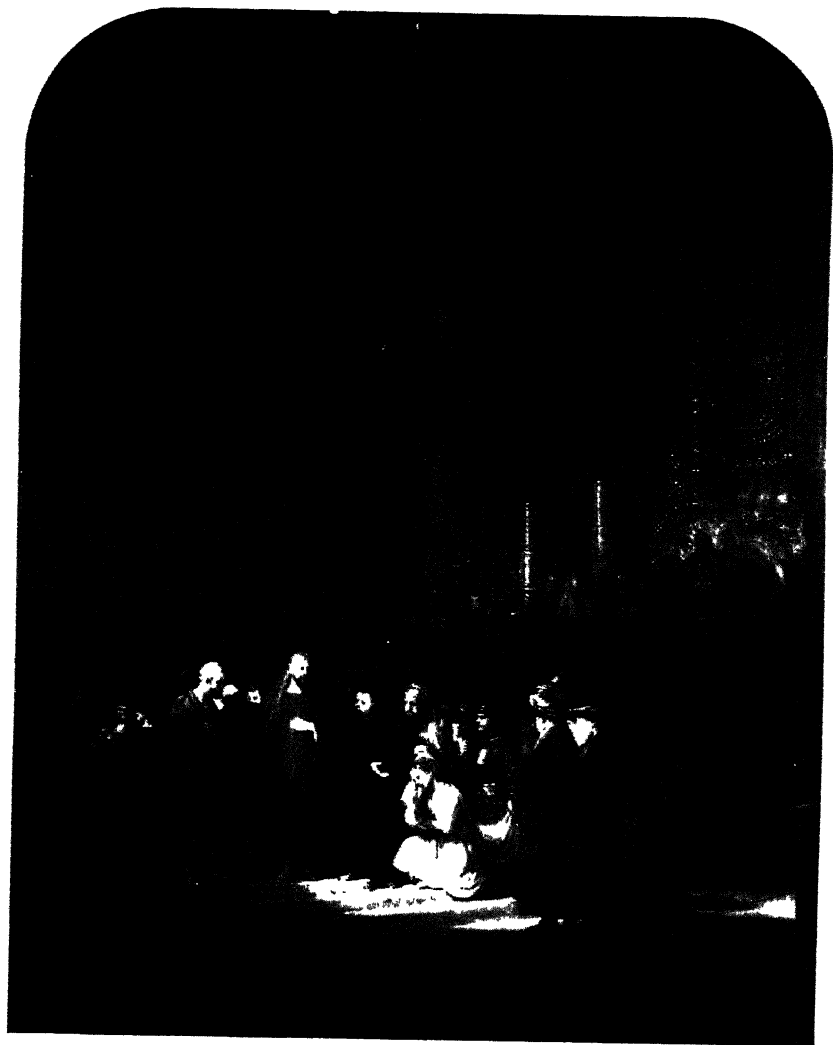
Our picture of *The Woman taken in Adultery* (45) will show what opulence of effect Rembrandt was able to obtain with these simple pigments. It is not only the more positive hues which glow with the splendour

## THE NETHERLANDS

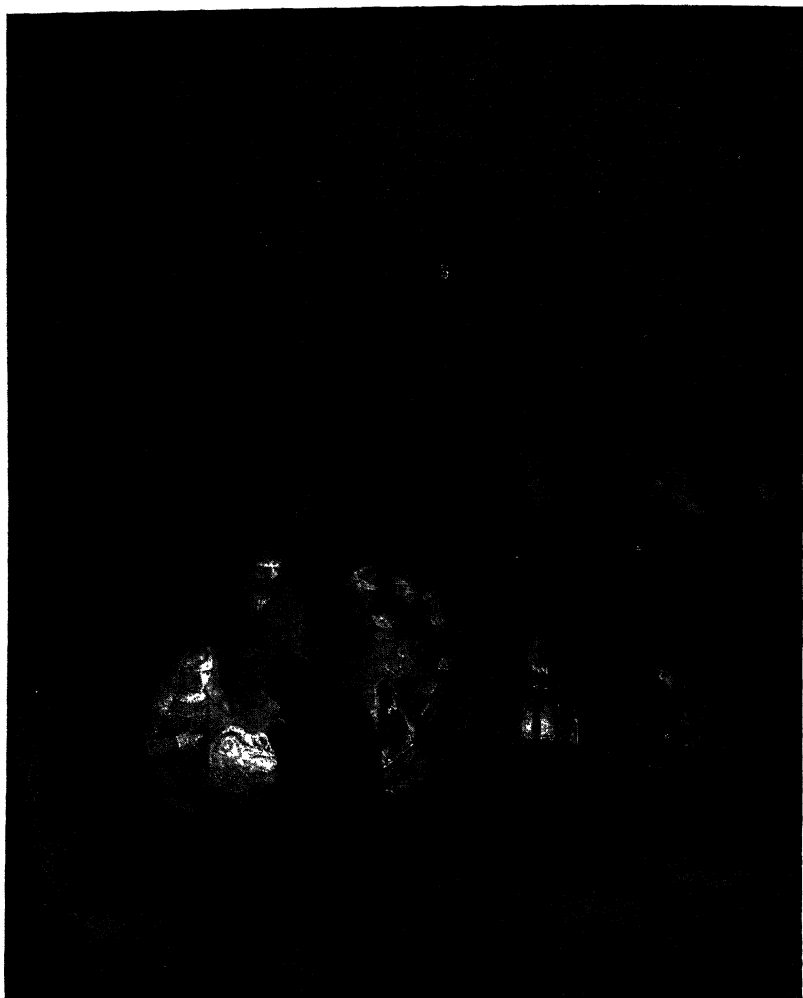
of jewels, but quiet browns and greys and whites assume a magical beauty. Hardly one of the figures, fifty or more, which are introduced into this little panel fails to reveal some special quality of colour or substance, a variety corresponding to the variety and subtlety of the human types assembled there. Only in the central group with its melodramatic illumination does the artist's creative faculty seem to fall short of its highest power. All the rest, though on a miniature scale, is vast and airy and full of living natural human beings. Here Rembrandt by reducing the scale of his figures, and by introducing the secondary group ascending the steps towards that huge and mysterious golden throne in the background, has augmented the appeal of immense height and space which was made in *The Philosopher*. The track of light serpentine through each picture in much the same way, but in the later design the track is far longer and more elaborate. We are no longer in a room but in a huge temple where the walls and columns soar away aloft into the invisible. As in the architectural fancies of Piranesi man is dwarfed by his own gigantic handiwork.

Feeling perhaps that by such elaboration he was in danger of defeating his own purpose, the revelation of humanity in its relation to God, as well as of breaking up the breadth of his design by employing too many tiny units, Rembrandt henceforth increased the relative size of his figures.<sup>1</sup> So some years later (1646), when

<sup>1</sup> The date of *The Women taken in Adultery* has been questioned. The style is that of the thirties; a little later perhaps than the *Presentation in the Temple* at the Hague of the year 1631. The



REMBRANDT  
WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY



REMBRANDT  
ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS

## REMBRANDT

he paints *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (47), man and his surroundings appear in their just relation. The interior of the stable illuminated by flickering lantern light is not less real in scale and homeliness than the peasant group which gathers to see and to adore the divine child, each figure complete, individual, natural, and perfectly adjusted to its neighbours. The handling is more decisive and masterful than in the previous picture, the colouring more simple and austere; the interplay of lights and shadows more subtle, and, a thing which Rembrandt alone could have thought of, through a window at the back we see a dim figure in a turban, the herald of the Magi, standing outside under the Star. So dim indeed is this figure that it is discernible only on a very bright day: but it will serve as an example of the infinite suggestiveness of Rembrandt's work at its best. *The Woman taken in Adultery* is splendid with the splendour of the theatre: here we have life itself. To the same period belongs the tragic, though much darkened design of *The Deposition* (43) and the slightly earlier *Diana Bathing* (2538), where the darkness is deliberate.

The period for the artist was all important. In 1640 he had painted the so-called *Night Watch*—the vast canvas which is the chief glory of the Rijksmuseum at Amsterdam. Our small copy by Lundens (289)

introduction of a number of little figures, by the way, is one of the chief points of difference between the practice of the greater and lesser masters in Holland. The greater masters aim at the breadth of design which comes most naturally when no more than two or three figures are presented. The lesser masters delight in elaborate multiplicity.



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reproduces the features but not the spirit of this impressive composition. It represents an 'Archer' company like one of those which Frans Hals painted so triumphantly. But Rembrandt's picture met with no such approval. It was severely criticized, more particularly because the painter had enveloped in darkness a scene which was supposed to be taking place in broad daylight. From this time, Rembrandt's popularity as a portrait painter steadily declined; in 1556 he was declared bankrupt, and his remaining years were spent in poverty. Everyone to-day recognizes that the work done by Rembrandt in these years of neglect represents the climax of his achievement. How could his contemporaries have been blind to what now appears self-evident?

We have seen how the majority of the artists of Holland approached the problem of the cabinet picture, beginning with the character painting of Brouwer, and moving steadily towards an ideal of a more and more luminous realism. This culminated about 1660 in the work of de Hooch and Vermeer. Then followed a period of over-finish in which men like Mieris and Netscher made their names, and Dutch art, left without either character or sound realism, came to an inglorious end. Now Rembrandt in his earlier work, though he stands apart from the other painters of his day, is not in all essentials different from them. The three portraits we have discussed are all fine pieces of character painting, but their excellence is attained without sacrificing any of those external technical characteristics which contemporary Holland admired

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and understood. So far as the mere handling of paint goes they have a delicacy, a force and a crispness which no other Dutchman of the day could rival, and which their glowing enamelled surfaces enhance. From the standpoint of the luminists and the realists, the concentration of vivid light upon the point of chief interest was a brilliant personal discovery which many sought to imitate and the majority could applaud, even though their own preferences led them towards a more open daylight.

Had Rembrandt moved with the general trend of national feeling, had he sought to make the lights in his paintings ever broader and broader, as he actually does in his etched compositions from 1640 onwards (and with magnificent results), all might still have been well with his worldly prospects. But from the first he had been fascinated by the mystery of half-lights and shadows, and this fascination grew upon him steadily. He came at last to place everything, whether it were the model before him or the scenes which his imagination had created, in a twilight world remote from the cheerful common day and, when interpreted in paint, undeniably a place of darkness. Magnificent as these creations are, we can imagine how the average Hollander found them much less agreeable and comfortable decoration for his walls than livelier and less sombre canvases.

And in another way they were liable to be unpopular. From the first Rembrandt had stood for the expression of character and, as we have seen, the emphatic expression of character calls for a corresponding emphasis in the actual handling. This emphasis Rembrandt developed to an unparalleled degree. No draughtsman before

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or since has been able to express so much with a few emphatic strokes of the pen or the etching needle ; no painter has handled the brush with more purposeful vehemence. The fierce brush strokes and loaded crumbling pigment of Rembrandt's mature style may well have seemed revolting, degenerate, revolutionary, to a generation accustomed to the delicate craftsmanship of a Terborch or a Metsu. We know the kind of phrases which popular criticism applies to-day to any such suspicious novelty.

Yet there is a very substantial offset to the emphatic character and vibrancy of tone which this force of brushwork may give. We can only derive full benefit from it when we see the painting at a little distance. Then the separate touches and strokes are fused and we are able to appreciate the effect at which the painter was aiming. But in a small room it is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to get far away from a painting. If we are painters, we may still be able to view the work with the eyes of experience, and judge fairly well what the result would be could we see the picture from a more distant position. The layman has not this experience. He must therefore judge the painting with the eyes of faith, and if his faith be weak he may judge wrongly. Rembrandt's recorded sayings show that he understood this clearly enough. "The picture will be seen to the greatest advantage if it is hung in a strong light, and in such a manner that the spectator can stand at some distance from it." And again, "Don't look at a picture close, it smells bad." Now in a land of palaces and great houses it might not be

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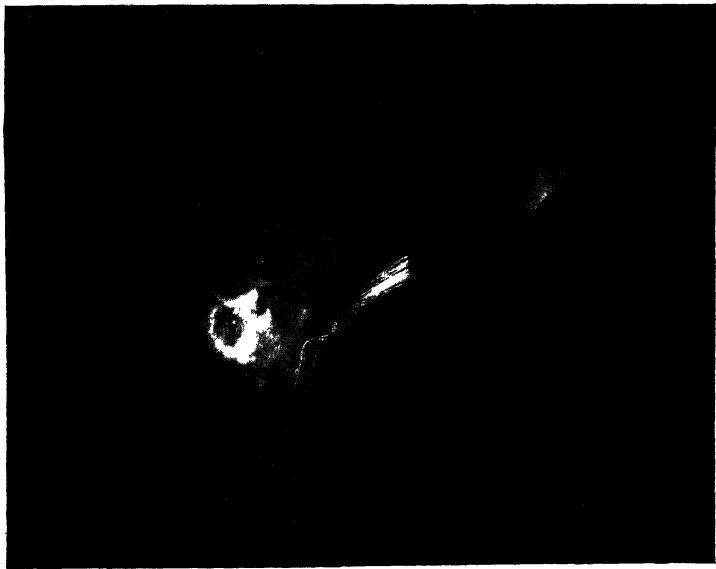
difficult to find rooms large enough to show to advantage even the most freely handled painting. But in the average Dutch private house the rooms were not very large, so that the conditions in which Rembrandt's mature work could be seen to the best advantage were not generally to be found.

We need not, therefore, wonder why the more conventional type of cabinet picture was preferred by Dutch collectors. Rembrandt's tendency to excessive darkness of tone was another practical disadvantage. In the case of a small painting, such darkness merely makes it a little difficult to appreciate the full significance of the work; we have to get the picture into a good light, and look at it for some time, before we can experience its fascination and receive its message. But if the picture be some three or four feet square the darkness tends to become overwhelming in any small room, quite apart from the frequent difficulty of placing the picture in a light which is strong enough to bring out the half-tones. We must then admit that the force and fascination of Rembrandt's later work were attained at a heavy sacrifice; it is magnificent but somewhat unpractical. Our modern artists also often indulge in a roughness of brushwork which looks admirable in a large studio, a gallery, or a public building, but does not show to equal advantage in a private house where the textures and contours of its environment are more delicate. If we have to make the choice, it is well perhaps to err on the side of character and emphasis; the opposite extreme of the polished and the namby-pamby is infinitely more perilous. Yet fitness

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to purpose is one of those cardinal principles which we cannot defy without instantly running into danger, and I feel that much talent, both now and in the past, has been jeopardized and robbed of its due reward from disregarding the fundamental fact that pictures have to be lived with. The moderns at all events do not take on the additional handicap which Rembrandt imposed upon himself by painting in tones of deep golden brown and black. The fashion for brilliant colour, now almost universal, has done a great deal to gain tolerance for many a thousand canvases which, in point of texture and workmanship, must be held to compare unfavourably with any other form of human handicraft which civilized man hitherto has been willing to accept, and pay for.

At Trafalgar Square the mature period of Rembrandt is represented almost entirely by a few superb portraits. Some twenty years separate the *Portrait of Himself* (221) from the earlier portrait No. 672, in which he shows himself prosperous, confident, strong and serene. In the later picture, one of a noble group of similar things, we see him as a man over whom all the waves and storms of life have passed. His dress is shabby and plain, his hair is grey, his massive features are deeply lined, his eyes though undimmed look out on us with steadfast melancholy. Instead of the subtle balancing of contours and spaces, the memories of Raphael and Titian, which distinguish the earlier portrait, we have a design of monumental simplicity. The figure stands like a great monolith, hammered out by a master in a mood of furious inspiration, and still bearing all over it the



PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF (672)



PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF (221)

REMBRANDT



REMBRANDT  
OLD LADY

## REMBRANDT

furrows of the chisel, furrows which not only accentuate the character of the sitter far more forcibly than any finishing process could do, but also hint of the solid rock from which the image has been hewn.

In some indefinable way the portrait conveys the idea of isolation. The sitter seems withdrawn from the air and light of our physical world, and set apart in some remote region of the spirit where the dark thoughts, the regrets, the disillusion, which the mask of the human face may often so effectively conceal, are suddenly and completely laid bare. In other portraits men are creatures of one mood or temper, dignified, picturesque, plausible, dramatic, as the painter happens to find them. Sometimes, as with Moroni at his best, we get very near to a complete man in his everyday aspect. But Rembrandt alone had the secret of probing deeper and reaching to man's inner self, moulded and dented and scarred in the past by the strokes of fate, but with full knowledge of its strength and its weakness, its hopes and its failings, looking out upon the uncertain future. Who but Rembrandt could unveil for us the contemptuous resolution of the *Jew Merchant* (51), the nobler and more kindly experience of the aged *Burgomaster* (1674), or the intense majestic sadness of the *Old Lady* (1675)? These three overpowering portraits answer for themselves.

If however the sorrows of Rembrandt's later life made him thus uniquely sympathetic with the tragedy of other human lives, the *Portrait of a Woman* (237), painted only three years before his death, proves that the more cheerful and comfortable aspects of existence



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were by no means lost upon him. Indeed this smiling young woman is no less wonderfully realized than the three sombre figures we have just mentioned. In painting her Rembrandt utilizes the broad and fluent method in which the masterpieces of Titian and Velazquez were executed, and handles it here with such ripe judgment and experience that the picture both in design and in technical quality may challenge the best that Italy or Spain can show to us. The intense vitality of the head with its fleeting smile is obtained without any of the tricks of a Hals or the labours of a Leonardo. The homely figure is posed with the simple dignity of some great Venetian portrait, and in one whose art is for the most part so dramatic in its earlier tendencies, so intensely tragic in its later temper, such a mood of supreme and genial serenity appears as a pleasant surprise. Indeed this Maes-like suavity of temper and pigment has led some critics to doubt both the date and the authorship. The more typically masterful study of *A Woman Bathing* (54) serves to show what a wealth of gold and crimson, what living humanity, can be suggested by a few simple pigments. Technically this little painting is beyond praise, and it has a secondary interest for Rembrandt students in that it is the only picture we possess at Trafalgar Square of Hendrickje Stoffels, that humble, lovable comrade with whom so much of the master's later life was bound up.

With his work in landscape I have dealt elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> as with the laborious process of self-education by

<sup>1</sup> *Notes on the Art of Rembrandt*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1911.

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which Rembrandt attained to his singular mastery of design. I need not therefore recapitulate the reasons we have for considering his career the most instructive of all such careers for the young student. Only by studying Rembrandt's work in chronological sequence can we understand how he provides the best illustration known in art of the famous theory of Reynolds, that well-directed labour plays a much greater part in the making of what we commonly call genius than any of us are wont to suppose. An examination of his drawings and etchings at the British Museum is the indispensable supplement to any study of his pictures at Trafalgar Square. Magnificent as many of those paintings are they do not illustrate more than a few aspects of his immense creative powers.

Accepting without question the faith of his age and country as he found it in his Bible, he devoted a considerable part of his life to its pictorial interpretation, and such was his insight into the human soul, such was the development of his technical gifts, that not one of the great Italians has rendered the spirit of Christianity with the same irresistible truth. Fra Angelico has glorified for us the beauty of holiness, Michelangelo has embodied in immortal forms the Creation of Man and the mystery of Death. Many have ennobled the relation of The Mother to the Child; the incidents of the Passion have inspired one great man after another. But Rembrandt's vision is the widest and deepest of all. To him "the supernatural is inconceivable except in relation to the natural. If man cannot exist without God, God cannot be made manifest except through

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man. So of all the Bible stories that of Tobit is perhaps his favourite, for there the sympathy of heavenly beings with earthly troubles is most consistently shown. . . . And among the countless designs from his hand which deal with the Life and Passion of Our Lord there is not one in which the personality of Christ is revealed except indirectly by its influence on the men around him." Now Rembrandt's knowledge of man in its extent and profundity was like Shakespeare's, and it is by this vast experience of things terrestrial that his celestial imagery has retained its power of convincing us, when almost all other presentations of the super-human have become just works of art.

The large painting of *Christ blessing Children* (757) has perhaps been a little unduly depreciated because many years ago it was purchased as a work by Rembrandt and quickly discovered to be only a school-piece. Yet if judged by any but the most exacting standards it is a fine thing, inspired by the master's spirit though without those emphatic accents which proclaim his handiwork. Critics still differ as to its authorship, but it is of less importance for us to consider whether it was done by Maes, as the child in the foreground immediately suggests, or by some other pupil, than to pause for a moment over one problem which a comparison with Rembrandt's drawings and etchings in a similar vein will inevitably propound. Why in the drawings and etchings of his maturity should Rembrandt have so generally sought for the most vivid and luminous effects, while in his oil painting he yields even more consistently to the fascination of deep

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shadows ? Why should the pictures be uniformly dark, while the etchings and drawings are the most brilliant of their kind ?

It is comparatively easy to understand why Rembrandt's etchings and drawings became more and more full of light as time went on. The production of large masses of shadow in an etching is a laborious business, and contrary to the true spirit of the medium. The marvellous and eloquent short hand of the plates etched by Rembrandt in open line work is unsurpassed both in expressiveness, since it retains the emphasis of a rapid sketch, and in luminosity, because of the vibrant white spaces left beside each clear black line. In the drawings also deep tones could usually be obtained only by reworkings which involve a loss of freshness. So the firm pen line modified with a few blots and washes of thin colour is naturally preferred as giving the most crisp and vivid result.

We may very rightly ask why Rembrandt did not attempt to obtain similar effects when painting in oil ? It certainly was not for want of precedents. In early life he had been powerfully affected by the example of Rubens, and our *Christ before Pilate*, of the year 1633, is analogous to those brilliant studies by Rubens which are the classic illustrations of oil painting in its most summary and luminous form. Five or six years later this influence of Rubens definitely changed the style of Rembrandt's etching. About the years 1639-1640 plates in which large masses of brilliant illumination are contrasted with small points or masses of shadow take the place of plates in which shadow is the dominant

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quantity. But Rembrandt's painting remained unaffected. Instead of broadening the masses of light in his later pictures he keeps his general key as dark as ever, merely striving, it would seem, for greater subtlety and vibration in the half-tones. We must conclude then that, to the last, he quite deliberately preferred the fascination of things half seen in the darkness, to the stimulus obtainable with a broader lighting,—that for him the most vivid reality was of less account than the mysterious infinite. Perhaps the character of his medium had something to do with this choice. In drawings and etchings he could combine the most brilliant and luminous effects with a slight and suggestive treatment which still left much to the imagination. In oil painting it is difficult not to be more substantial, and as his figures gained in substance Rembrandt may have felt that they lost in mystery. But the transparent shadows of oil paint which supply this mysterious element so naturally must as time passes grow ever more deep and dense, so that Rembrandt's manner is not one to be generally recommended. I am not sure, however, that any modern painter has yet taken full advantage of his drawings and etchings. In these Rembrandt appears to me to have suggested novel uses of light and design, and of colour too, which the modern adventurer might find it profitable to explore, since they do not seem incompatible either with our modern vision or our modern way of handling paint. What a picture, for example, might be made out of the 1654 *Christ at Emmaus* (etching) by some less tormented Van Gogh !

## CHAPTER X

## DUTCH LANDSCAPES

As the heat of the struggle with Spain died down in the early part of the seventeenth century, the Dutchman was free to embellish his newly found leisure. The taste for landscape, which more than a century earlier had been such a conspicuous feature in the religious art of the Netherlands, immediately revived. So the meadows and waterways of Holland, in summer sunshine and under the snows of winter, with their picturesque accompaniment of cattle and trees and windmills and stately buildings, the shallow busy sea, and in particular its wide horizons and watery skies, came to provide the native artists with excellent material for some fifty years. But there was no single tradition of landscape on which the pioneers of this new art could found their efforts. The century opens with a series of experiments in different styles, and it is only by degrees that a consistent and characteristic manner of working was evolved. Even the learned continental critics who have done so much to clear up the obscurities of Dutch painting have not hitherto traced to their sources all the different streams of artistic feeling in

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Holland which united towards the middle of the century. It will be enough for us to note one or two of the chief tributaries to the main river.

Several of the earliest Dutch landscape painters are represented at Trafalgar Square. In the *Winter Scene* (1346) of Avercamp the scattered figures, the gay colour, the tree forms and the thin clear pigment prove his direct artistic descent from Pieter Brueghel, and in the *Fishermen by an Estuary* (3533) of Arentz we see that some of Brueghel's peasant humour has survived along with his technical methods. Does any more vivid illustration exist of the instinctive disgust which every true angler must feel at the sight of some unsportsmanlike rival hauling in fish wholesale by means of a net? This Flemish influence came in no doubt with the numerous emigrants from the Spanish Netherlands who, for religion's sake, took refuge in Holland. The rounded masses of dark green trees and the sharp blue sky of Cornelis Vroom (3475) represent the great rival influence—that of Italy, where Paul Bril and Domenichino had prepared the way for Elsheimer and for Claude. Unluckily the National Gallery possesses no specimen of that daring and independent pioneer of landscape, Hercules Seghers. His remarkable talent, if interested to some extent by the plains of Holland, was moved still more powerfully by the mountains on the road to Italy, which had then, and which still retain, so potent a fascination for the artist travelling from the North. The menace of those Alpine solitudes, with the play of stormy light across them, introduced through Seghers a note of serious

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purpose into Dutch landscape which might otherwise have become too easily optimistic or trivial in its aims. Although in point of reputation and output he was their inferior, Seghers exercised a dominant influence upon the genius of Rembrandt, and was the artistic parent of much that we admire in Van Goyen and Ruysdael.

The prolific Jan van GOYEN is the earliest of the landscape painters who are typically and thoroughly Dutch. Through his practice of incessantly drawing from nature, Van Goyen gradually learned to surround with the atmosphere and scenery of Holland the lively figure groups by which he first attracted notice. This landscape element increases until at last in many of his compositions man becomes relatively insignificant. Our five dated pictures, belonging to the painter's full maturity (1638 to 1645), prove that he employed two methods of work which are really more distinct than they may appear to be at first sight. Two of these works are painted in oil monochrome, three in delicate colour upon a monochrome foundation.

Of the two monochromes, the *River Scene with Fishing Boats* (2580) is the more attractive. Indeed it would be hard to name a more refined and luminous study of sunlight filtering slowly through the vapours hanging over a calm sea. The density and recession of the suspended cloud masses are perfectly rendered ; so is the pale silvery illumination of the intervals between them. The boats and figures are disposed with singular skill, and are enveloped by a veritable atmosphere which knits the whole design into complete unity.



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We find similar qualities in the *Scene on the Ice* (2579), painted seven years later ; the same quiet luminosity, the same spirited grouping, the same atmospheric envelopment, though in this case the atmosphere has a fulvous quality like that of a winter's afternoon in London.

So completely expressive is this simple technical method—as simple in its essentials as a wash drawing in Indian ink—that we may ask ourselves why it has not been more generally employed. These quiet tones of grey are evidently unsurpassed as a means of rendering space and atmosphere ; their coolness suggests a mood that may be pleasantly serious or solemn as the occasion demands ; the inevitable correspondence of each tone with its neighbour compels the result to be harmonious. Also, as we saw in the case of Rembrandt, the artist being freed from the necessity of matching colour as well as tone, can allow himself the utmost variety and liveliness in his brushwork. Only some very strong reason can account for the fact that these so manifest advantages of landscape in oil monochrome should not have been more consistently exploited. That reason must, I think, be found in the fact that monochrome, at least on any considerable scale, has not the same decorative charm as work in colour, and that without colour many of the most pleasurable impressions which we derive from nature are shorn of all their delight. We instinctively seek in works of art some relief from the troubles or the monotony of life, so that the general preference for colour in the ornament of our houses and Galleries is

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wholly right and natural. Yet it is undeniable, too, that there are many effects of landscape which depend so much for atmospheric tone upon light and shade that the introduction of much positive colour is a mistake, just as there are certain solemn moods of nature for which only monochrome is appropriate.

Nor is there, surely, any reason why monochrome should be unacceptable, even from the decorative standpoint, if it is used only for works of moderate size, and used with discretion. A monochrome, if not more than two feet square, will never look offensive even in a small room, and indeed may be made no less attractive than most pictures in colour, if the quality of the pigment be good, if the tone suggests silver instead of ink, or slate, or soot, and if it be thoroughly well framed. An ebony frame will enhance by contrast the luminous and atmospheric quality of a *grisaille*. Gilt frames are less satisfactory; too often they seem to disturb and compete with any delicate tones there may be in the painting. Yet if the monochrome be rather dark, as with Rembrandt, gilding is necessary lest the total effect should become too heavy. The lights on the gilding support the lights in the picture, and so add breadth to the design; while by contrast with the shadows they give depth and richness of tone to the painting. Yet when all is said and done, a roomful of monochromes even by men of the rank of Rembrandt or Mantegna would be slightly monotonous in aspect. Monochrome is an art which shows best when one or two examples are seen in the midst of things more richly coloured, but then it will show to such advantage

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that we may continue to wonder why it is not commonly practised.

Van Goyen's more characteristic style is an agreeable hybrid between monochrome and full colour; the large *Winter Scene* (1327) and the *Windmill by a River* (2578) will serve as examples. The *Winter Scene* is harmonious, atmospheric and not without spirit in the treatment of the figures. But this pleasant impression is accompanied with a certain tameness of total effect. The figures have not the liveliness of the little figures in his monochromes, just as the colour, muted by the all-pervading atmospheric greyness, does not rouse us by any forcible notes such as those which modern art introduces. The same charge might perhaps be brought against the *Windmill by a River*, for it is conceived in a scheme of grey and grey-blue contrasted with brown and light yellowish-green. But the whole is so well put together, the sky above recedes to the horizon with such impressive truth, the distance is so admirably suggested, the foreground so lightly touched in, that we have to admit the painting to be in its particular way a complete and perfect interpretation of nature in a mood that was worth painting.

Had that mood been more commonplace, the design less compact, the tones less happily adjusted, the details less tactfully managed, criticism might find fault with work so modest in its aim and its result. For indeed much of the work of Van Goyen himself, of his immediate followers such as Solomon Ruysdael, and of the Dutch landscape painters in general, is open to serious criticism. It is frequently content with commonplace



JAN VAN GOYEN : WINDMILL BY A RIVER



VAN DER NEER : CANAL SCENE

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design, with mechanical finish, and with a hybrid colouring which makes us suspect that the artist is evading difficulties instead of facing them and conquering them. The result is a quantity of pictures which are useful articles of furniture, because their quiet and sometimes rather heavy tonality suits a corresponding type of living-room, but furniture they remain. We may not look on them with active dislike, but not one of them is capable of exciting any feeling of surprise or fascination. When, for example, we see a moonlight piece by Van der Neer, it is generally just a Van der Neer, a trifle better or worse as the case may be than a hundred others we have seen. Now and then of course as in the *Dawn* (2283), and still more in our noble *Canal Scene* (732), the artist reveals unexpected force and depth of feeling. This latter work indeed suggests that, under some more stimulating influence than those he happened to meet, Van der Neer might have become a really great landscape-painter, for the picture is too elaborate in design and in balance of tone to permit of its being dismissed as a mere happy accident. His artistic life seems to have been one long struggle with poverty, and we may perhaps most charitably think of him as one with true natural sensibility who was driven by stress of circumstance to paint 'pot-boilers.' Yet habitual 'pot-boiling,' however plausible the excuses for it may be, seems to argue monotony of vision no less clearly than it indicates some lack of spiritual grit.

During the war there was placed in the Gallery a large *Sunset* from the Duke of Westminster's Collection.

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This had long borne the name of Rembrandt, but of recent years has been universally accepted as a most important work by Adriaen BROUWER, with foreground figures by Teniers. A comparison with our *Tobias and the Angel* (72), also for many years attributed to Rembrandt, proved that the landscape in each picture was technically identical. Our picture then must, in all essentials, be accepted as a work by Brouwer. But there are certain passages that do not resemble Brouwer, notably in the foreground. The heavy impasto of the ground and the figures of Tobias and the Angel have no resemblance to Brouwer's manner in any of his other works. As with the Westminster picture we clearly have a painting by Brouwer, probably left unfinished, in which the foreground was completed by some other hand. Indeed the recension may well have been the work of two painters. Some artist like Jacob Doomer may originally have laid in the figures of Tobias and the Angel. But these last, and the ground behind them, have been worked in Rembrandtesque fashion by another more masterly hand. Continental students of Rembrandt deny that the work is Rembrandt's own, and some of the ablest maintain that it is English of the eighteenth century. If that be so, there is only one conclusion to be drawn—the picture was retouched by Sir Joshua Reynolds. He was once its owner, and at one time was a very close imitator of Rembrandt, as the portrait of *Giuseppe Marchi* in the Diploma Gallery will sufficiently prove. The pitted impasto of this portrait is exactly similar to that of the principal figures in this Brouwer landscape. Also the quality of the blue

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sky with the white and grey clouds is exactly similar to that of Reynolds in his charming portrait of *Mrs. Meyrick* in the Ashmolean Museum, while it is quite unlike the looser handling of the skies in Brouwer's acknowledged products.

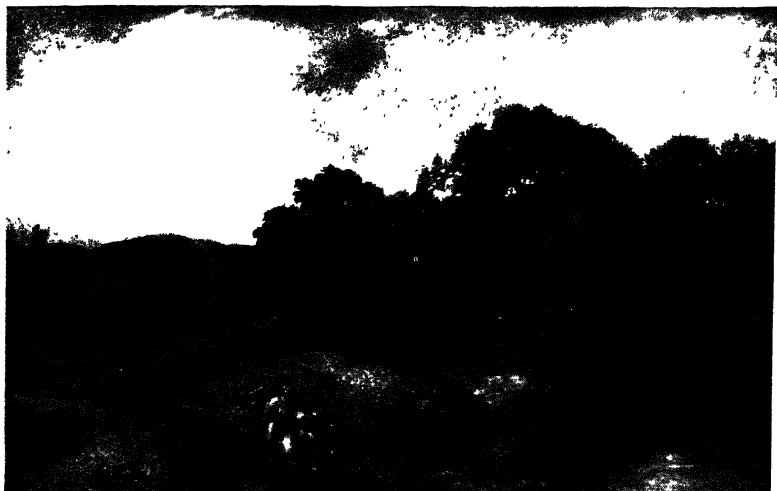
Here then, it would seem, we have a composition by Brouwer, to which a foreground and figures may have been added by a follower of Rembrandt. Then a century later Reynolds, the owner of the picture, worked (as we know that he did in some other cases) upon the portions which he considered unsatisfactory, with the result which we see to-day. Out of a few tumbled sand-hills, two tree-clumps, a shadowed stream, and a sky of no marked character, Brouwer has created a design so solemn and impressive that the name of Rembrandt, which the picture bore for at least a hundred years, was not unworthily bestowed. The mysterious darkness from which the river emerges, the rolling country to the left sweeping up to the open lonely downs, the great rounded masses of vapour driving, not without a hint of menace, across the twilight sky, blend into perfect unity. The combination is so subtle, so unusual, and so apparently spontaneous, that it defies all formal analysis. We can feel that the mass of deep shadow to the right is perfectly proportioned to the rest of the picture, but why should the white cloud seen above them under that exquisite passage of blue (the very *craquelure* is that of Sir Joshua) seem pregnant with things to come? Why should the odd, awkward arabesque of bare ground and green patches to the left give us just the right contrast of



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pattern to the major passages of darkness and light? Why should a picture which defies all the unities of natural illumination (for the wandering light plays this way and that just as the painter inclines) have a convincing solidity and an atmospheric coherence denied to a thousand other carefully studied landscapes? It is lower in tone than we like our modern pictures to be, but that is probably essential to its peculiar significance, to the ominous atmosphere about Tobias and the Angel upon their journey to Mesopotamia with its marvels and danger of death. Rembrandt, time after time, has immortalized the legend in its homely human aspect. Brouwer in a way probed it no less deeply, for he saw in it a type of the struggle between man and the unknown unfriendly powers of nature, a struggle which in much of the finest landscape is the avowed or latent motive.

A like gravity of temper distinguishes Philips KONINCK, one of Rembrandt's followers. The panoramic views in which he delighted have seldom proved tractable or satisfactory material for painters. Though analogous scenes in nature may give us a most pleasurable sense of air and space, the immense amount of small detail which has to be interpreted by a painter, the elaborate study of tones and colours required, present difficulties which have proved too much for all but the very greatest. Koninck, for instance, tends to be bothered by the number of trees and cottages and casual incidents which his *Landscape* (836) includes. But he succeeds in bringing the whole into unity, unity of mood at least, by the cold and sullen sky



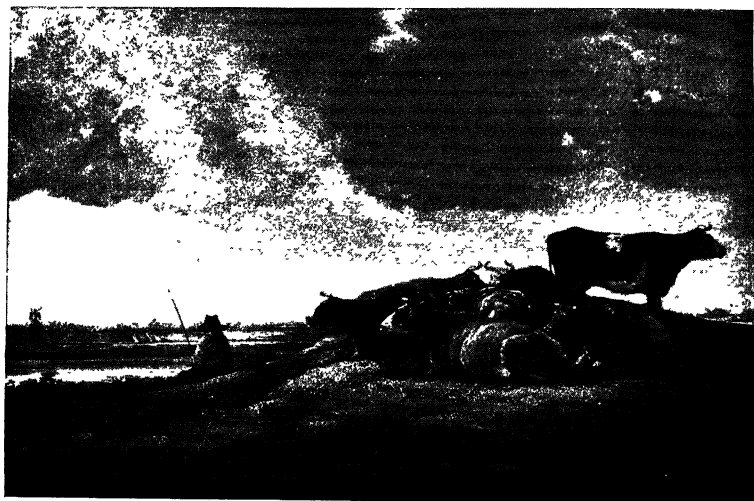
ADRIAEN BROUWER : TOBIAS AND THE ANGEL



PHILIPS KONINCK : LANDSCAPE



AELBERT CUYP : "THE LARGE DORT"



AELBERT CUYP : CATTLE WITH HERDSMAN

## DUTCH LANDSCAPES

which dominates all this expanse of plains and hills and broad waters. The fusion of parts may not be perfect, the tone and the colour may not be those of a great picture, but in virtue of its austere mood and its wide outlook, the work continues to hold its own in good company. The *Beginning of the Storm*, formerly in the Wantage Collection and now in that of Lord Crawford, is still more impressive, and so much more broadly handled as to be not unworthy of Rembrandt, whose name it bore till recently.

More prolific, and far more popular both then and now, was Aelbert CUYP. Like his older contemporary Claude, and Turner in more recent times, Cuyp was a devotee of sunlight who in his own field must be accounted a master. In his work the earthy brown tones of van Goyen, by whom Cuyp's earlier painting was largely influenced, are gradually transmuted into gold, rather heavy gold perhaps, but still with a genuine glitter and shimmer of its own, which enables us to distinguish it at once from the mere gilding borrowed from Italy by men like Berchem and Both. Our *Portrait of a Man* (797), solid and sober, proves the sound training he received from his father Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp. From that we pass at once to the cattle pieces of his middle-life, on which, together with certain fine river scenes with shipping, his fame is founded. The large *Landscape* (53) illustrates some of his defects as well as his merits. It was no mean feat to carry a blaze of golden light over so many square feet of canvas, and to envelop in this misty sunlit air both foreground and distance. The envelopment

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perhaps is a little too complete, for as Ruskin has pointed out, the warm tones of the middle distance are too uniformly warm, and the undue suppression of the cooler local colours gives these passages a hotness which is neither truthful nor pleasant. The defect is found in many other works by Cuyp, as are an uncertainty as to the true tone of vermilion in sunlight (*e.g.* the horseman's coat), and some rather feeble conventions for foliage, such as those used for the big foreground tree. In "*The Large Dort*" (961), one of many views of Cuyp's native Dordrecht, we see similar faults and excellences. His attempt to present the milkmaid in sunlight is an honest effort which ends in total failure. The sky on the other hand with its suggestion of brooding oppressive heat is the most natural thing of the kind which had hitherto been painted. The clouds with their luminous edges in "*The Small Dort*" (962) are even more characteristic of Cuyp's power and truth as a sky painter; the heavy ruminating cattle being no less typical of his power of suggesting weight and volume. The *Horseman and Cows* (822) is a good example of his breadth of design. The effect of evening sky however is one which Cuyp at his best could handle better. He has done so notably in a large water-piece which passed through the London sale-rooms a short time ago. There the complicated cloud forms often observed when the sun is low were handled with the utmost luminosity and precision. Lastly we may select for notice the *Cattle with Herdsmen* (2547) from the Salting Collection. The general tone is rather dark, and clouded with too much yellow varnish. But the

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forms of the cattle are grouped with so much majesty, and make so noble a mass against the lowering sky, that we may wonder whether Crome had not seen this, or some similar picture, and derived from it a hint for at least one of his masterpieces. Like Crome, Cuyp was a real painter, a solid and substantial workman, seeing the meadows and canals round Dordrecht with the same honest and capable vision which Crome bent upon Norwich. If we consider that the Dutchman when painting sunlight had to find his way for himself, we must admit him to be no unsuccessful pioneer in a field which the moderns are still exploring, even though the admiration which his work inspires is now no doubt a little drowsy.

The other Dutch painters of cattle and landscape have no comparable importance for us. Paul POTTER'S talent is shown more clearly in our two small pictures than in the big ungainly *Bull* at The Hague, which in the past earned him a certain unmerited prominence. He was emphatically no supreme master, but there is a genuine luminous sunshine in our *Landscape with Cattle* (849), which makes it pleasant to look upon, in spite of the niggling touch and not wholly fortunate colour. The cattle too are cleverly drawn, but cannot be seriously weighed against the somnolent monumental creatures depicted by Cuyp. Yet Potter was a sincere if laborious artist, and a few paintings, like our *Cattle in a Stormy Landscape* (2583), show a dramatic power which a longer life (he died at twenty-nine) might have developed into grandeur. His more versatile follower Adriaen van

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de Velde not only helped other landscape painters, like Koninck and Wynants, by introducing figures into their pictures, but had a very pleasant talent of his own. Our *Landscape with a Goat and Kid* (1348) in its way could hardly be done better, so clear so vigorous and so delicate is the painting. And the little *Forest Scene* (982) has such a freshness and serenity of mood, such an intimate feeling for nature in one of her most attractive moments, that it might well have its place in the nineteenth century rather than the seventeenth. A few similar woodland scenes exist elsewhere to prove the painter's sincerity. Later he inclined to the metallic smoothness and the hot blues and yellows of Wynants, Karel du Jardin and Berchem, so that pictures like our Nos. 867 and 868 too often represent him.

With Potter and Adriaen van de Velde we may consider Philip WOUWERMAN. The record of more than a thousand highly finished pictures, most of them containing a number of figures, produced during a working life of some thirty years, is proof of his fertile fancy and busy hand; their subjects, drawn from the battles of the Thirty Years War, the hunting field, the sea-shore, the farm, or the village indicate his versatility. All are cleverly drawn, are painted with a sparkling touch and not infrequently have passages of pleasant cool colour. Yet, as with other clever *improvisatori*, only a small part of this profuse achievement will endure the ordeal of examination. The lively compositions are too crowded, the design consists of too many small things, the tones are not satisfactory; even the colours, when once the painter's

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typical palette is known, rarely provide us with the charm of novelty. Of his busy compositions, our *Interior of a Stable* (879) is a favourable specimen. The spirited brushwork, the admirable notes of white and yellow and blue, the clever drawing and grouping, are harmonized by a much broader massing of light and shadow than is common with Wouwerman. Still finer is *On the Sea Shore* (880), the most perfect of all the works by the artist with which I am acquainted. Nowhere is the balance between figures and landscape, between earth and sky, so happily adjusted, nowhere has Wouwerman set his favourite white horse in a more satisfying relation to all around it, nowhere has the grey vapour rolling up from the sea been more convincingly rendered, nowhere is his vision more sincere, his mood so dignified, his art so consummate.

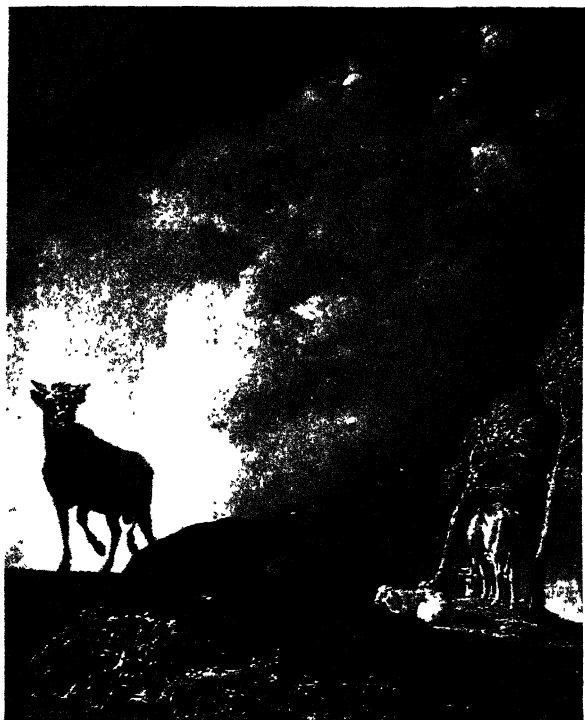
These painters of landscape with horses and cattle have always found a wider popularity, from Cuyp's day to our own, than those who have risked the painting of landscape unadorned. Yet these last, perhaps because they have no incidental attractions wherewith to allure the public, have either failed altogether, or have proved the strongest men of their time. So when we pass from Cuyp and Potter and Wouwerman to consider Jacob RUISDAEL we are conscious that we are in the presence of talent more considerable than any of them. He is less outwardly attractive. His palette consists of dark green, a little brown or dull red, and a fine cool grey or grey-blue. His tone is never cheerful and too often inclines to blackness, from his habit, especially in later life, of painting thinly over a dark ground.



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And though the ostensible subject matter of his pictures may shift from the sea-shore to the forest, from pastures and bleaching grounds to mountains and rocky torrents, his mood seldom varies from its cold, lonely and melancholy habit. But that habit is based upon a real communion with nature, with nature as she reveals herself to the wanderer in solitary places at twilight under an uncertain sky. In the seventeenth century he is the true forerunner of men like Theodore Rousseau and Courbet in the nineteenth. Ruysdael, indeed, was one of the few old masters whom that formidable critic the youthful Constable did not disdain to copy, and to praise because he enveloped the most ordinary scenes in grandeur . . . and "*understood* what he was painting."

We possess more than twenty examples of Ruysdael's work ; it will be sufficient to look at four or five of them to appreciate his merits. In the *Bleaching Ground* (44) we can admire the fine balance of parts, the liveliness imparted by the gleam of light on the sandhill which rises beyond the cottage, and the solemn sky overhead, making, as it were, the keystone of the design. In the *Waterfall* (855) the spire rising over the edge of the tumbled hillside leads the eye irresistibly upwards to the zenith and the soaring clouds. The church in the large *Landscape* (990), as in the smaller *View near Haarlem* (2561), after our eyes have travelled across an expanse of level country lit by a few faint wandering sunbeams, performs a similar office, rising under the great rounded masses of vapour as a Venetian campanile might do in some background by Titian or Tintoretto. In the more luminous *Shore at Scheven-*



PAUL POTTER : CATTLE IN A STORMY LANDSCAPE





JACOB RUISDAEL : VIEW NEAR HAARLEM



JACOB RUISDAEL : ENTRANCE TO THE FOREST

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*ingen* (1390), we may enjoy the way in which the sweep of the incoming tide is answered, but with no mechanical repetition, by the swaying, drifting shapes above ; in the *Entrance to the Forest* (2563) we find the sky to be of a deeper grey-blue, the clouds more golden, but no less gravely dominant. There is a hush in the air : at any moment the storm may break.

Now we could not feel such sensations time after time unless the parts of these pictures were thoroughly consistent with each other : if the tones and masses and conventions employed were not as mutually harmonious as the temperament which enrols them is evidently sincere. Yet in spite of this harmony and this sincerity the pictures themselves may seem rather dull to our modern eyes. They are often quite dismal in tone, partly no doubt from the use of too dark a ground, and the details rarely stand the test of close examination. Trees and foreground leafage are detestably difficult things to interpret in paint, but Ruisdael's convention is more uniformly mechanical than we think it need have been. Even the sky that he studied so lovingly has not always the variety of the real thing, but is often built up by repeating small similar forms, which in these days of free brushwork we very naturally do not like. Yet when all these defects are admitted, those who are tired of seeing nature painted as it were in her Lord's-week silks and muslins may well hope for the day when fate will give us a new Jacob Ruisdael.

The name of Meindert HOBBEEMA is commonly associated with that of Ruisdael as representing the culmination of Dutch landscape, and in the picture

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market Hobbema's works are among the most expensive products of the School. This valuation, however, must be attributed less to their average excellence than to their comparative rarity. For a large part of Hobbema's achievement is undeniably dull, having the heavy tone of Ruisdael, by whom he was much influenced, but without Ruisdael's intensity of feeling, while the petty contortions of the foliage and the scattering of the lights and shadows make the result as unrestful as it is gloomy. The *Path through the Wood* (2571) will serve as an example. But in a few exceptional pictures, Hobbema shakes off these defects, and the reputation earned thereby has served to counterbalance his failures. Three pictures at Trafalgar Square will illustrate this.

Let us first consider the *Ruins of Brederode Castle* (831). Putting aside the wriggling and mechanical touches which stand for leafage (they must indeed be regarded as the current convention of the School), we see that we are here face to face with a real design. Even the confessed Cubist will admit the geometrical science with which the rectangular masses of the castle are put into their proper place and supported by their surroundings. Their verticals are echoed in the water below ; the bank on which the building stands and the distant horizon to which the water leads the eye serve as a foundation. These verticals and horizontals are set in an octagonal frame of which the converging forms of the sky, the bank to the left, and the sloping tree trunk to the right make the corner pieces. The rounded cloud rising above the castle derives an added



HOBBEEMA : RUINS OF BREDERODE CASTLE



HOBBEEMA : VILLAGE WITH WATERMILLS



HOBBEWA : THE AVENUE, MIDDELHARNIS

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force from contrast with these rectangles ; the contrast of saliences with recessions is no less cleverly managed. Albeit somewhat cold in temper, the picture is evidently the work of a thoroughly practical and scientific mind.

In the *Village with Watermills* (832) we see the same spirit at work, yet much more subtly. The general tone is singularly pleasant. The cool sunlit greens and the fine grey-blue of the sky are exactly balanced, and have exactly the right luminous quality. The masses of shadow are just large enough to foil these lights, and yet not so large as to cause the general effect to be heavy. The small details which so commonly detract from the breadth of Hobbema's picture are fused in this case with the larger masses, and these masses themselves are disposed in an arabesque as happy as it is unexpected. Note for example how the curve of the tree which leans across the middle of the picture is answered gently by the tree to the left, and more triumphantly by the swell of the clouds to the right, while the level lines of the buildings and the shadows over the meadow supply the requisite horizontals.

At the age of thirty Hobbema obtained a post in the local Customs, and a small regular income. From that time he ceased to paint : at least our *Avenue, Middelharnis* (830) is the one picture by him which bears a later date than 1670, although he lived till 1709. But in this picture he seems to have found a spiritual freedom which none of his earlier work possessed. In that work we frequently found science, but it was a science cramped and confined by writhing



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boughs and ever encroaching woodlands. Here he deals with a more characteristic Holland, the Holland of wide open plains and a vast expanse of sky, full of homely details of dyke and orchard and tilled field and roadside cottage, but of air and light and space as well. Hobbema's geometry enables him to make noble use of these large elements, to order his horizontals and his uprights so that we feel every yard of the plain receding to the village on the horizon with its quaint church spire, and then may follow the lines of the poplars upward to that silvery sky with its nobly marshalled clouds. For a moment it might seem as if the spirit of Piero della Francesca had entered into this canny Dutch tax-collector, so large is the conception of the piece, so exactly like Piero's is the contrast between the pale grey-blue of the sky and the brownish-green of the foliage. And this foliage, though not touched in with the breadth and freedom of a great master, is at least broad and free compared either with the general average of the School or of Hobbema's own previous efforts. So his career ends on a note of grandeur which is rare in any School or at any period, and considering the real science of the man, it would be unfair to belittle this triumph because many of his other works are unequal to their current repute.

The influence of the Dutch School upon the beginnings of English landscape, notably upon Crome and Gainsborough, was so considerable, the response in England to the technical inspiration of Holland was so direct, that we may well regret that *The Avenue*, *Middelharnis* should not have come to the notice of

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English artists before 1835, when it was shown at the British Institution. By that time Crome had been dead for many years, Constable and Turner were growing old, and the thoughts of the next generation ran in channels unsympathetic to design. Technically the English had derived from Holland a tradition of sound craftsmanship, but with it too a pettiness of detail, a dullness of tone, and a somewhat stuffy and shapeless idea of landscape as a whole. For these defects, Hobbema, Ruisdael, and the host of inferior Dutch landscape painters must in part be held responsible. Gainsborough's instinct for breadth and colour, Crome's instinct for largeness of planning saved them from disaster. But the rank and file were less fortunate, and it is only here and there that we find any English landscape which has really succeeded in utilizing the merits of the Dutch without at the same time adopting their defects. The admirable *Snow Scene* (1038), by William Mulready, is a readily accessible specimen of good English work in the Dutch manner; the once highly admired pictures of Patrick Nasmyth might be quoted as illustrating the opposite extreme.

The fact that we can still take a keen delight in Hobbema's *Avenue*, or Wouwerman's *On the Sea Shore*, or in some of Ruisdael's more open compositions, indicates that where the design is spacious the eye accustoms itself quickly enough to the tone convention used by the Dutch. The harmony and balance of the design compensate us, as in a monochrome sketch, for the want of the vivid realism or the striking colour schemes at which most modern painters aim. We

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must accept sobriety, gravity even, as a substitute for the fiercer thrills which the French have taught us to look for; but there are subjects still to which a measure of gravity is not inappropriate, there is still a place for pictures which charm by persuasion rather than by direct attack. Only we must remember, when using technical elements so essentially restful and simple, to see that while aiming at simplicity we do not achieve emptiness and, while studying to be quiet, we do not become dull.

So different is Dutch landscape in general from our contemporary ideas of what landscape ought to be, that we might seem already to have considered it at excessive length. But the truth is that Dutch landscape very seldom accomplishes all that it might have done. Its scale is appropriate to the rooms in which we live; its orderly and not really complicated technique should appeal to the craftsman's instinct; its subject matter is at least as interesting as that upon which most landscape painters of to-day spend their lives. But against these advantages we must set certain defects: a false idea of the value of insignificant detail; compositions that are too crowded or too elaborate for the scale of the painting; a surface polish which frequently makes the sky look like enamel and not like air; and above all a heaviness of tone in the shadows which destroys that modest pleasure we derive from a cabinet picture when it looks like an open window, and invites us to gaze through it upon some fictive world. These defects are particularly apparent

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to the modern painter, because they are the very faults which his teaching is calculated to suppress. Breadth of treatment, freedom of brushwork and luminosity of tone are qualities from which cabinet painting might acquire a fresh lease of life, if they could be combined, as they well might be, with the qualities found in the best Dutch landscapes.

This combination the modern Dutch School, in which James Maris was the most prominent figure, may be held in some measure to have effected. Yet their temper was usually too superficial, their vision too obviously picturesque for great results. Three or four small landscapes by Matthew Maris, showing a finer technical sense and a far more profound feeling for nature, are notable exceptions, and deserve a place with the best things of the kind which seventeenth century Holland gave us.

## CHAPTER XI

### SEASCAPES AND ARCHITECTURAL PIECES

THE Dutch sea-painters provide a much less fertile field for speculation. Ruskin long ago devoted some of his most entertaining pages to the abuse of their conception of the sea, and no sensible person who reviews their products will be inclined to question the general justice of his verdict. Only when they paint water that is calm or almost calm do the Dutch marine painters seem comfortable. From the first a gale of wind or the thought of a real wave makes them childish or incapable. Look, for example, at the petty conventional sea in Simon de Vlieger's *Mouth of a River* (3025), one of the earliest of our marines. Van de Velde's eye fails him when the wind rises, and we know that in his case the failure can not be set down either to want of experience or of courage, since he constantly took part in sea-fights in order to get new material for his painting. Even Jacob Ruisdael, a fine observer whether on land or at sea, becomes timid in touch and inky in colour when depicting the breakers in his *View on the Holland's Deep* (2567).

When we have once granted the entire inability

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of the Dutch to suggest the weight, the volume, the movement, and the infinite variety of a breaking wave, we may admit that by them several other and milder aspects of the sea were rendered well. Hendrik Dubbels, for instance, is quite a minor name; yet look at his little *Seapiece with Shipping* (1462). It has the atmosphere, the liveliness, the pleasant fresh colour and the absence of artifice which we admire in a sketch by Boudin. Jan van de CAPPELLE was more ambitious. His *Calm* (2587) shows that he could design a simple subject admirably, but in another little picture, the *River Scene with Sailing Boats* (964), he proves himself a master. The drifting masses of vapour and their reflections in the still water are handled with a freedom of touch, a sense of atmospheric tone, and a charm of soft colour which Gainsborough might have envied. Nor is this a solitary triumph. The sky in the large *River Scene* (966) is still more wonderful in movement, volume and recession. Not even in the work of Constable do the great masses of cloud sail more convincingly across the middle air: far above the earth, yet still far below the blue vaporous roof of our visible daylight world. The barges and boats in the foreground are much too brown and heavy; possibly they have darkened with time, as oil and umber are apt to darken. In other works by Van de Cappelle we find skies that are not only too dark, but are over modelled, as if the mastery of the substance and movement of clouds which his best works reveal did not come to him easily. But if we turn from No. 966 to almost any other picture containing similar cloud effects, the

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supremacy of Van de Cappelle will be evident. Constable in *The Haywain* may suggest more vigorous motion and more play of silvery light, but even he has never quite caught the slow majestic advance and the buoyant vaporous substance of these clouds by Van de Cappelle.

The famous William van de VELDE achieves no such naturalistic triumph. He draws his shipping with the most intimate knowledge and the most delicate craftsmanship; his sense of spacing is admirable, his tone is clear and luminous, so that his numerous little 'Calms at Sea' are usually pleasant to look at. But his skies are almost always so smooth and polished that they lack both movement and that vibrancy which is essential, not only to atmospheric effect, but to fine colouring. Yet his spirited drawing of hulls and masts and yards and rigging rendered him no bad influence upon our native school, as we may see in the work of Charles Brooking, whose *Calm* (1475), is not only touched in with much of the Dutchman's lively skill, but has a grey atmospheric quality which Van de Velde himself did not attain. Even the great Turner studied Van de Velde closely, so closely that the design of his 'Leader' seapiece reproduced in the "*Liber Studiorum*" is almost identical with the *Ships at Anchor* (977). None the less Van de Velde is essentially a minor figure, with neither the power, the originality, nor the large vision of a considerable artist, indeed he would not deserve even the consideration of a paragraph, but for his place in art history and for the undeniable fact that his best works are excellent

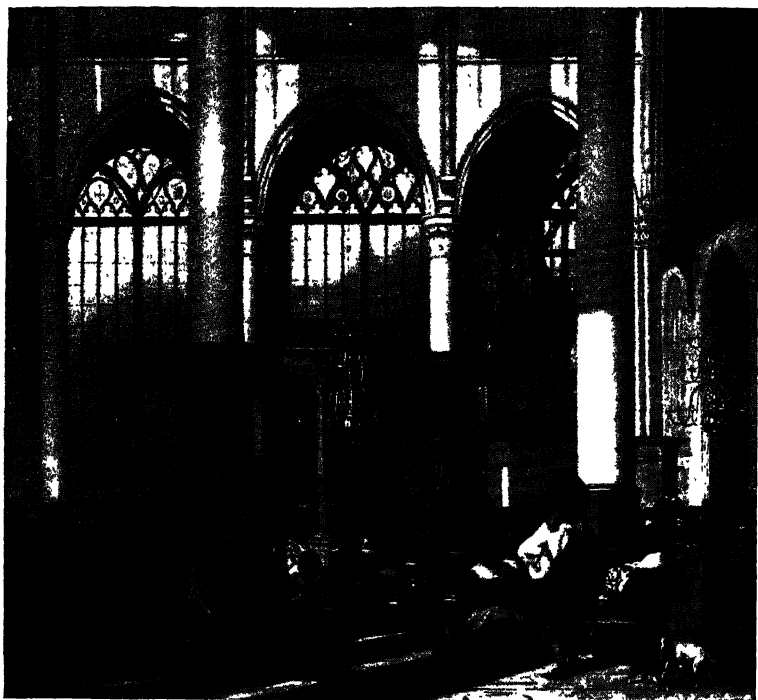


JAN VAN DE CAPPELLE : RIVER SCENE (966)





PIETER SAENREDAM : INTERIOR OF S. BAVO, HAARLEM



EMANUEL DE WITTE : INTERIOR OF A CHURCH

## SEASCAPES AND ARCHITECTURAL PIECES

furniture pictures. In his worst, where the angry waves are like shavings and the storm clouds look as if they were painted with a mixture of milk and ink, Van de Velde is almost contemptible.

It is a little curious that the Dutch, at the very time when they held the foremost place in Europe for naval matters and marine enterprise, should have produced no painter to whom the sea in its more majestic aspects made any strong appeal. Possibly the development of Dutch technique had something to do with this disability. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the freely handled monochrome of a Van Goyen would have allowed a painter to catch something of the form and movement and mass of great waves. But as the century proceeded painters sought for a naturalism more luminous and more minute. That in its turn exacted a more elaborate technique; the elaborate technique was adapted only to the presentation of things at rest or in very slow motion. So the characteristic triumphs of the Dutch School (Rembrandt always excepted) are static triumphs. Whether the subject matter be figures or cattle or landscape or seascape, the things which are painted best are things which stand still. So when they paint architecture some of them do it exceedingly well.

And when we think how varied and attractive a prospect the old cities of Holland present to our eyes to-day, their ruddy domestic brickwork so pleasantly broken by flashes of white, and making with the trees and canals so admirable a setting for the larger public buildings (in which we rarely fail to notice some un-

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expected elegance of design or ornament), we may well wonder why architectural subjects did not find more general favour, and why those which were painted are so limited in range. Could it have been devotional feeling, a desire to renew or prolong the impression made by long aisles and lofty vaults that encouraged Steenwyck and Van Bassen? From the *Interior* (1132) by the former we can see his direct technical descent from the early Netherlandish School more plainly than we can guess his intention. The *Palatial Buildings* (1010), of Dirck van Delen, show an equally close connexion with Flemish painters of the type of 'Velvet' Brueghel, and suggest by their opulence an appeal to some wealthy patron, an appeal justified in some degree by clever painting and good colour.

With Pieter SAENREDAM we come to methods of work more characteristically Dutch and an unmistakable sincerity. In the *Interior of the Domkirk, Utrecht* (1896) the restful feeling of that cool bare interior is admirably conveyed, the pale blue sky seen through the tall windows enhancing the sense of space and light and quiet. The *Interior of S. Bavo, Haarlem* (2531) is no less large and luminous, while a pleasant impression of power is added by the massive columns. The architecture of Saenredam's famous successors may be more elaborate and more picturesque, but it is not more truly eloquent. And this eloquence is not the fanciful rhetoric of a Piranesi, a paean of imaginary magnitudes and magnificences, but just such a song of delight in the making of great pillars and vaults of stone as might spring to the lips of a working architect.

## SEASCAPES AND ARCHITECTURAL PIECES

Even that able and original artist Emanuel de WITTE does not always give us this the true poetry of architecture. His *Interior of a Church* (1053) is a more vigorous and brilliant picture than Saenredam's. The whites in vivid sunlight and delicate half-tone are foiled most skilfully by notes of black, of which the dark dresses of the congregation supply the chief mass, while the suggestion of houses outside dimly seen through the windows is conveyed with exquisite refinement. But these refinements, these delightful accidents of light and shadow and local colour, while they make the picture both effective at the first glance and attractive when we examine it more closely, do certainly distract our thoughts from the purely architectural quality of the place—a quality which we might think to be in itself too abstract to be compatible with the presence of a crowd of people and with strong effects of light, were it not that Rembrandt in *The Woman taken in Adultery* (45) shows us that the three ideals, the architectural, the human, and the picturesque, can unite in harmony when the compelling spirit is great enough.

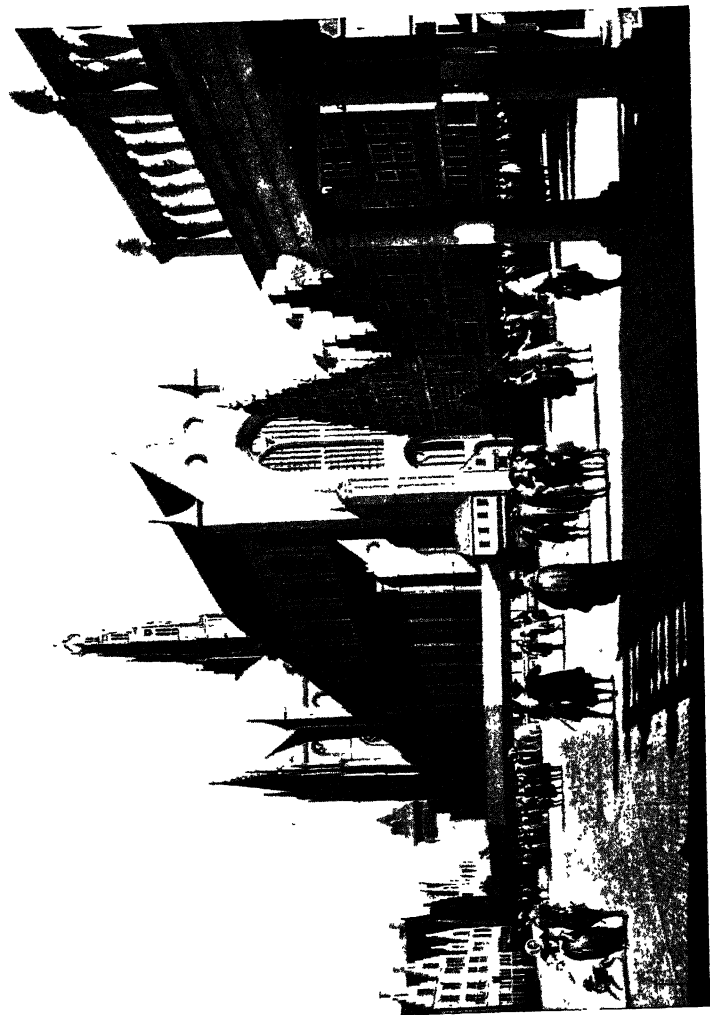
Gerrit BERCK-HEYDE in his *Interior of S. Bavo, Haarlem* (1451), is even less successful than de Witte in conveying this sense of height and massiveness, though the church he depicts is the same as that in which Saenredam painted his more powerful picture, and Berck-heyde elsewhere shows himself to be an uncommonly fine artist. Indeed, among all the open-air pieces of the Dutch school hardly any is so thoroughly satisfactory as the *View in Haarlem* (1420). Here we look across the market-place from the shadow of the

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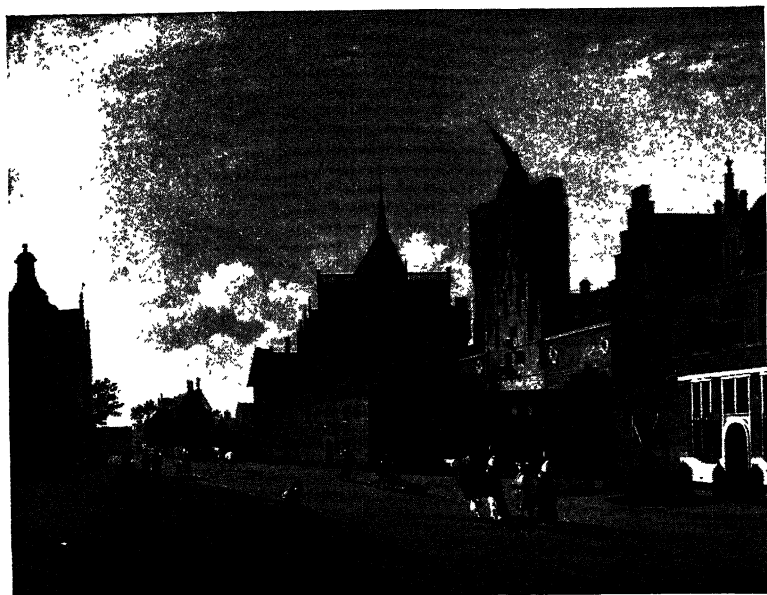
Stadthuis, so long famous for the Regent-pieces of Frans Hals, to the exterior of that same church of S. Bavo, and the stepped gable of the Flesher's Hall, much as we see them to-day. Excellent material for a painter; and how excellently used! With what a fine employment of cool browns and greys does the whole place come into being before us, bathed in air and quiet sunlight and receding so naturally from the shadowed foreground to the spire of the great church which rises far away into translucent air. When anything is designed and painted so thoroughly well as this, when it is so congenial to our memories of history or travel, so quietly vivacious in aspect, and withal so serviceable as a wall decoration, how can we explain the fact that such pictures are very rare except by admitting that the craft required to produce them is far more unusual than our present antipathy to realism allows us to recognize openly?

It has taken people a good many years to find out that a living draughtsman of similar things, Mr. Muirhead Bone, was doing work which has no parallel in the past. Mr. Bone, it is true, performs habitually feats which Berck-heyde performs only on rare occasions, and has a daring and variety of design of which the Dutchman never dreamed; but since the latter was first in the field and tackled problems of colour as well as those of form, it would be unfair to press the point that such triumphs were comparatively few.

Jan van der HEYDEN for example, with all his skill and application, just falls short of complete success. His *Street in Cologne* (866) is admirably planned, and



GERRIT BERCK-HEYDE : VIEW IN HAARLEM



JAN VAN DER HEYDEN : STREET IN COLOGNE



JAN VAN DER HEYDEN : GOTHIC AND CLASSIC BUILDINGS

## SEASCAPES AND ARCHITECTURAL PIECES

is brilliant and vivid enough, but we can see at a glance that it is too bright and too hard. The subject is one dependent upon the suggestion of space; yet space is not suggested, and the metallic blue of the sky accentuates the harm done by a definition too uniformly sharp. The tiny *Landscape* (993) is far more aerial, so is the massively planned *Street in a Town* (994). Were the light and shade in this picture not divided into two almost equal masses the general effect would be less awkward. But the distant buildings and trees are admirably treated, the sky if less good is adequate, and there is real air and light all about except where the rather heavy foreground recalls us to thoughts of paint. We might almost imagine that the painter himself had felt this defect, this want of observation, and had tried to correct it in his *Gothic and Classic Buildings* (992). For in this latter picture he has studied the reflected lights in the parts not directly illumined by the sun with so much attention that the result verges upon the unsubstantial. Instead of heaviness in the shadows we find purity and clarity carried to an extreme. The arch in yellow stone towards the left centre recalls Canaletto in the crispness and accuracy of the workmanship, so does the slightly mechanical treatment of the cloud above. And by a very odd coincidence the actual design anticipates in a general way one of Canaletto's own pictures in the Gallery, the *Ruins and Figures* (135).

We can, indeed, most easily form an opinion of the quality of work like Van der Heyden's by turning from this picture, while the memory of its neat workmanship



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and luminous tone is still fresh, and walking straight to Canaletto's famous *View in Venice* (127), which hangs not fifty yards away. The Canaletto is universally deemed one of that painter's masterpieces, and quite rightly. But how black and false its shadows now appear to eyes accustomed to the Dutchman's radiance! The grandeur of the composition remains, so does its solidity; Van der Heyden is thin and metallic by comparison. But the tone of the Canaletto no longer seems the tone of nature: it is only a fine pictorial convention. Then turn to the works of Guardi hard by. The ordeal which was trying for Canaletto is fatal to them; they seem to have lost all their light, their truth and their cohesion. If these Italians are matched with Berckheyde's *View in Haarlem*, the comparison will prove even more completely destructive, so far as absolute truth of tone and colour is concerned. In point of handling, in management of pigment, and in largeness of design the Italians have no doubt an advantage, but in an age when three-dimensional presentation is so highly valued it is unfair to overlook any man who rendered the values of nature so perfectly and so tactfully as Berckheyde has done in this picture.

When dealing with the Italian figure painters of the full Renaissance we saw how valuable it was to keep the workmanship of certain great masters in mind as touchstones by which the value of other men's presentation of Form could be tested. Berckheyde's *Haarlem* might be used in the same way, as a test for landscapes where the painter's aim has been realistic. Such landscapes, conforming more or less to that ideal of the

## SEASCAPES AND ARCHITECTURAL PIECES

open window, which we have already discussed in connexion with Dutch figure painting, are for the moment quite out of favour. The claims of abstract design, of three-dimensional creation in pure form and pure colour, and other complex ideals, often more nearly related to science or philosophy than to the craft of painting, are naturally more attractive to the youthful mind, always in terror of not being up-to-date, than any form of art which is open to the charge of being photographic. Now photography has certain natural disadvantages, which if imitated by a painter would lead him to disaster : but it does not deserve contempt. The camera is a mechanical instrument ; it cannot make those innumerable little readjustments of rhythm and mass and contour that an artist may require to give emphasis and significance to the things before him. It cannot always catch delicate mutations of tone ; its results are monotonous in texture, and it has not as yet solved the problem of colour in satisfactory fashion. On the other hand it can show certain aspects of form almost impeccably. The graces of a leafless tree, the sweep of a snowfield up to the sharp rocks of an Alpine summit, the curve of a breaking wave, can be recorded in an instant by the camera in a way that not one painter in a hundred could do after a lifetime's labour. And these mechanical records, though they may not always or often be satisfactory substitutes for pictures, may at least claim a certain usefulness to painters, in that they keep before the eye a standard of natural form which should incite the artist to strive for a higher standard in his own drawing. So we need not be

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argued out of our preference for naturalism or realism, if we have it, by any contemptuous comparisons with the camera. And we should remember that the highest type of this Dutch realism is not to be found even in Berck-heyde, but rather in that famous *View of Delft* at The Hague, by Jan Vermeer, which critics of every persuasion have united to admire.

Though the 'Still-life' pictures and the flower paintings of Holland find a place in almost every public and private collection of Dutch art, they do not seem to call for detailed notice. The 'Still-lives' are usually well done from the technical standpoint, their static quality suiting the scrupulous Dutch method of work. But neither in design nor in luminosity can they be compared with the best work of Chardin, with whom the modern tradition of painting such things has its origin. Nor can the precise metallic flower-painting of men like Van Huysum have much charm for those who know how freshly and lightly and sympathetically flowers have been painted during the last half-century. In other fields the Dutch may claim to have reached or come near to perfection. In this field they have been so far surpassed by others, that they are subjects for the historian rather than for the critic. The sparkle of light on a plate or a drinking glass, the flash of vivid colour from a poppy or a lobster, may give us a moment's pleasure; now and then these hybrid elements may be piled up with a certain dignity, but as a class, Dutch 'Still-lives' are really no more than furniture pictures, and often rather heavy furniture.

PART II  
THE GERMAN SCHOOL



## CHAPTER XII

### THE GERMAN SCHOOL

THE tangled beginnings of art in Germany can most easily be unravelled by a glance at a map. The great territory comprised between Vienna and Hamburg on the East, and between Cleves and Basle on the West, is divided into a number of river systems. These in turn are separated from each other by more or less definite natural barriers of mountain and forest which, in the absence of mechanical transport, were once very real impediments to general intercourse. So German art springs up in a number of centres, each in a measure independent of influences from outside. Among the river systems that of the Rhine naturally takes the first place. To the North, on the lower Rhine, we find a centre of art in Cologne and Westphalia, sometimes in touch with France, but more often with the Netherlands. Then in the South-West towards Colmar and Basle on the Upper Rhine, we find a second school having relations, perhaps *via* the Lake of Constance and Ulm, with Augsburg, Nuremburg and the Danube Valley. Saxony to the North-East had its own masters; so for a few decades in the fourteenth century had Bohemia.

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At the end of the fifteenth century the majority of these German painters were quite unknown to the outside world; their reputation like the style of their work was almost wholly local or provincial. But the development of engraving on wood and in metal had already begun to give Germany a reputation in the art world before Dürer and Holbein came to make that reputation assured. The subsequent achievements of German art have not perhaps been comparable to the immense efforts expended upon them, although in the field of critical research the nation has acquired a fame hardly less than that which she holds in philosophy. That research has naturally not overlooked the foundations of German painting, and we are now able to place in approximate relation and sequence the few relics of early German art which have survived. The majority of these relics are not of the first artistic importance, although they are almost always sincere in aim and agreeable in colour. Their representation at Trafalgar Square though far from complete is relatively good, the most serious *lacuna* being the absence of any specimen of the South German School, which in Konrad Witz of Basle possesses a Teutonic parallel to Hubert van Eyck.

Our earliest pictures belong to the School of Cologne. The *S. Veronica* (687) must take the first place as being a version of a picture at Munich, traditionally given to 'William of Cologne,' but possibly the work of one Herman Wynrich von Wesel, towards the end of the fourteenth century. The date, as we shall see, is of some interest. The *Three Saints* (705) by Stefan

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Lochner, a native of Constance working at Cologne, comes two or three decades later. In both paintings we see the same blonde tone, the same well nurtured serenity of face and the same fine bold colouring, the fresh apple-green in the second picture being specially typical for it occurs again and again in pictures of the school. If we are to understand the close relation which existed at this time between Paris and Cologne, we must recognize that these typical features are found in the painting of *The Trinity* (3662) in the French Room, conjoined with no less evident characteristics of the miniaturists, like Jacquemart de Hesdin, who worked for the Duc de Berri about the year 1400. The Masters of Liesborn, of Werden, and of *The Life of the Virgin* illustrate other and rather later phases of the Cologne School, and show that it retained a quaint character of its own and its pleasant colouring even in phases which are (as in the case of the Master of Werden) clearly provincial. One exception must be made. The Master of S. Bartholomew towards the end of the century, under Netherlandish influence, became a craftsman of the first rank, as our panel *SS. Peter and Dorothy* (707) will sufficiently prove by its power and delicate beauty.

We must pause for a moment to note the exceedingly fine quality of the colours and mediums which the Cologne School employed from the very beginning of the fifteenth century, at a time when the technical innovations of Hubert van Eyck were in their infancy. Work like that ascribed to 'Master William of Cologne' and his follower Stefan Lochner could not have been



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executed without fine pigments, well prepared panels and a limpid tractable varnish-medium.<sup>1</sup> The brothers Van Eyck had gifts of vision and manipulation which these Cologne painters could not rival, but so far as qualities of surface, of colour and of permanence are concerned, the Germans are so little behind the Flemings as to deserve to share with them in some measure the credit of the 'invention' of oil painting. When we attempt to trace the spread of the method of the Van Eycks over Flanders and Europe we must always keep in mind the existence of Cologne as an independent centre of technical knowledge.

Towards the middle of the fifteenth century, the formal ideals and narrow outlook of early German painting were freshened and enlarged by the line engravers. The chief impetus was given by Martin Schoengauer. More famous for his prints than for his paintings, he appealed thereby to a far wider audience than any man who was only a painter could then hope to do. His prints travelled to Italy, where one of the more fantastic of them was later to excite the admiration of the youthful Michelangelo. Schoengauer had a keen eye for the humours of everyday life, and above all a sense of grace and charm, both in his personal types and in his designs, which brought him well-merited repute. To this the suave influence of

<sup>1</sup> The brilliant copper-green which Lochner and his successors employ could hardly have kept its freshness had it not been 'locked up' in varnish. So we may regard their work in general as varnish painting (the twin brother of oil painting) rather than as executed in some size or tempera, and varnished only when so completed.



M. SCHOENGAUER  
CHRIST APPEARING TO MARY MAGDALENE



DÜRER  
THE FOUR RIDERS

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Roger van der Weyden, at that time the most popular of northern painters, no doubt contributed. Some of Schoengauer's prints (the *Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene*, for instance) are planned with so fine an economy of material and so perfect a balance, that even to-day they might serve as models of large and expressive composition. His contemporaries, however, seem to have been chiefly attracted by the delicate calligraphy of his line, and it is to Schoengauer's example above all that we must attribute that love of minute and precise linear execution, with pleasant little curves and ripples and flourishes where the subject admits, which becomes characteristic of German painting a generation later. Our little *Virgin and Child* (723), though it may not be from Schoengauer's own hand, will serve to illustrate the beginnings of this linear treatment. For the nobler traits of his art we must study his engravings.

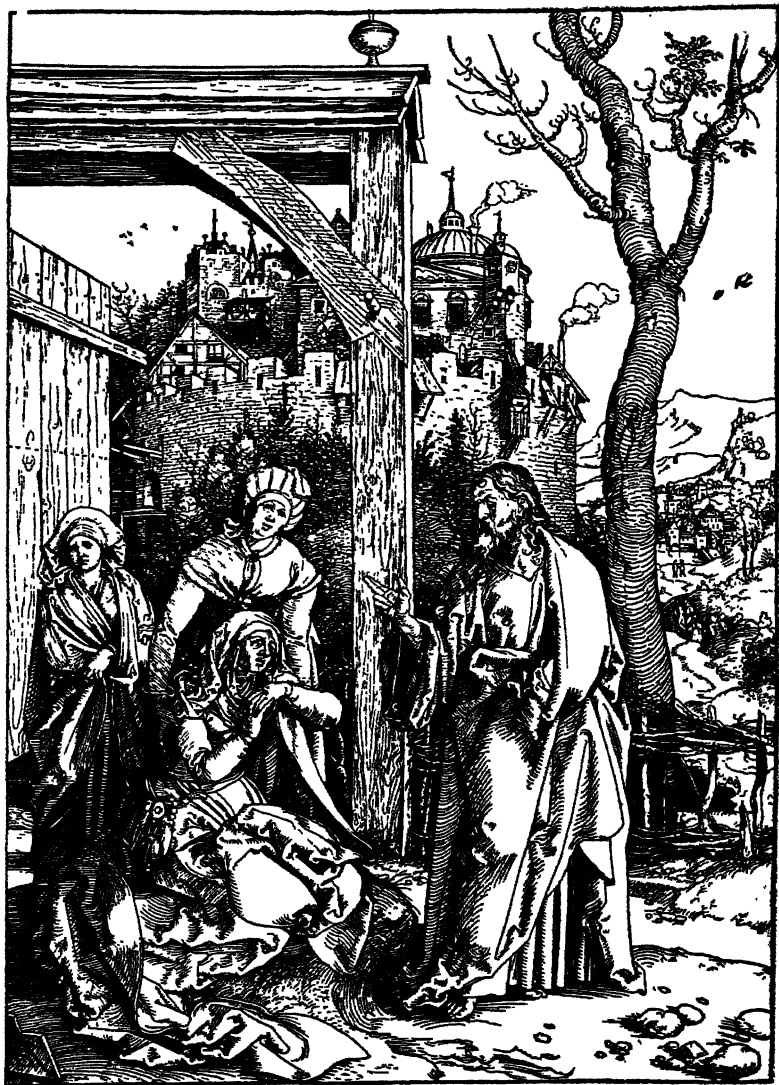
From Schoengauer we pass to the one German artist who in mental range is comparable to the great Italians. In Albert DÜRER of Nuremberg a strain of Hungarian ancestry enlivens the patient Teutonic character, so that scrupulous workmanship and conscientious industry are in him directed by wider and more strenuous ambitions than those which fired the majority of his compatriots. His early work is influenced by the old Gothic art of his country, by the all-pervading style of the Netherlands, and most definitely and conspicuously by Schoengauer. Dürer, like Schoengauer, was first and foremost a draughtsman in line, but quickly developed a more opulent fancy and far greater

## THE GERMAN SCHOOL

accomplishment. Indeed his mastery of line, whether in engraving on metal or in designing for engravers on wood, is such that he occupies in his own craft a place like that of Rembrandt among etchers. This manual dexterity with the point Dürer displays in his drawings, not without a pleasant pride in his own craftsmanship, which makes them delightful as fine calligraphy, as well as models of firmness of touch and precise adaptation of line to express form.

There is indeed a beauty in the quality of his line, analogous, as in the case of Leonardo da Vinci, to the beauty of his person. Of that person he has left us several noble records, of which the portrait at Madrid is perhaps the most perfect. As with Leonardo, too, this exceptional beauty of person was allied to conspicuous intellectual powers. Though his life was devoted to incessant professional practice, Dürer became the friend of several of the most eminent men of his time. His writings prove him at once a cheerful companion and a grave logical searcher into the principles of his art. In his work we may trace a general progress and development from the angular stiffness and huddled composition of his Gothic beginnings to a larger and more genial vision which a visit to Venice in 1505 did much to confirm.

This development is seen most clearly in Dürer's engravings. His pictures, the portraits always excepted, do not display so well the natural bent of his genius. The large woodcuts illustrating 'The Apocalypse' exhibit his early style. The *Martyrdom* with which the series opens is wholly Gothic, crowded with



DÜRER

CHRIST TAKING LEAVE OF HIS MOTHER



DÜRER  
MELANCOLIA

## THE GERMAN SCHOOL

fierce faces and grim incident. Several of the plates are frankly grotesque though filled with the outpourings of an exuberant fancy, extraordinary feats of drawing, and a wonderful wealth of landscape detail. The scenes of combat are specially vigorous. The warrior angels, divested of their traditional youth and fairness, are become old and hardened men at arms, setting about their task of destruction with knitted brows and stern purpose, hardly less terrible indeed than the *Four Riders*, who in the most famous of all these designs come galloping over the fallen. Six or seven years later Dürer executed a second series of prints illustrating 'The Life of the Virgin.' In the interval he had stayed in Venice, where acquaintance with Jacopo de' Barbari, and in particular with Giovanni Bellini, had taught him much. In 'The Life of the Virgin' the figures are no longer packed together in agitated clusters, but are broadly grouped against masses of trees or architecture, so that the compositions acquire that air of restful dignity which we admire in Bellini and his pupils. Two prints in particular call for notice. One is *The Repose on the Flight into Egypt*, where the child angels pick up the splinters which fly from Joseph's adze, while great unfinished buildings tower up behind in the sunshine; the other represents *Christ taking Leave of His Mother*. In its majestic pathos this last is worthy of Bellini himself; in design neither Bellini nor Titian has left us anything finer.

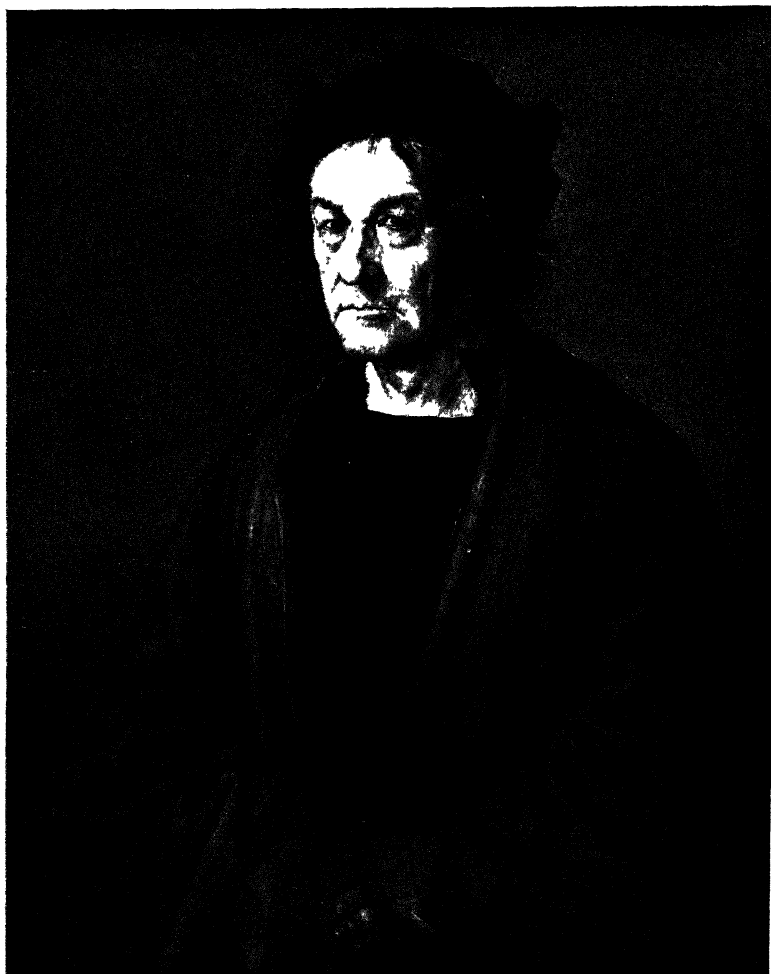
The woodcuts of the 'Little Passion' are sufficient proof that this increase in breadth and graciousness was not attained at the cost of tragic power; indeed it is to



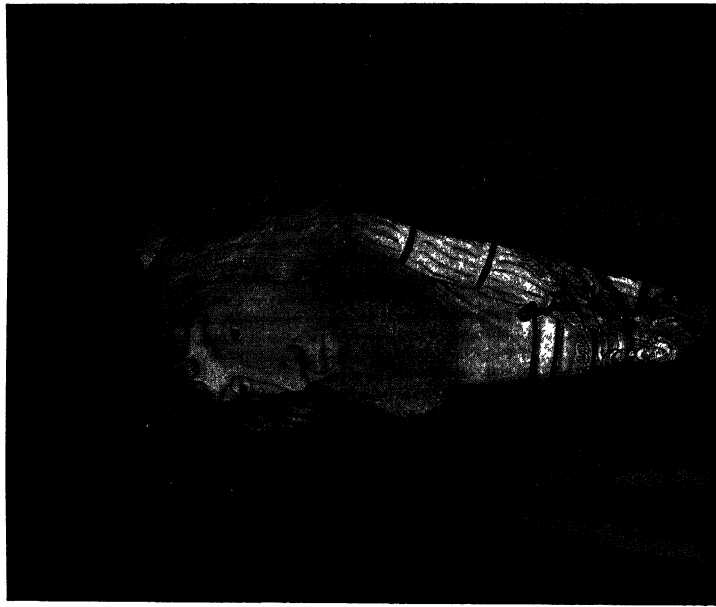
## THE GERMAN SCHOOL

the artist's later years that the famous prints of *The Knight, Death and the Devil*, and the *Melancholia* belong. This last in particular, both by the grandeur of its design and by the speculation which its accumulated symbolism compels, has a perpetual attraction for the sympathetic observer, quite apart from the miracles of mere craftsmanship which it contains. Dürer's seated figure is the one Northern parallel to the brooding demigods whom Michelangelo had painted two or three years earlier in the Sistine chapel. Here we find the same giant strength, the same striving to break through the veil which hangs over human knowledge, the same disillusion. Not that we should think of Dürer as one of those who wilfully lived in sadness. The lively tone of his correspondence, no less than the charm of many of his plates, notably some of his Madonnas and the little *S. Anthony*, are sufficient to contradict the idea. Yet always underneath this lightness of touch there lies the gravity of a really great man, whether it be displayed in his uniform determination that everything he does shall be done as well as he can possibly do it, that no difficulty shall be evaded which persistent effort could overcome, or in the attempt which he made to solve that ancient problem, the making of a Canon of Proportion for the human figure.

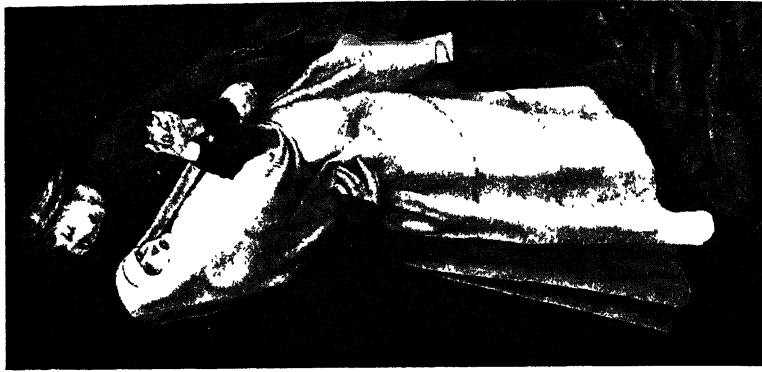
When such a temper, in alliance with an almost unique gift of linear expression, turned to portraiture, the result naturally was remarkable. The *Portrait of a Young Man* at Hampton Court, a product of his Venetian experiences, has an incisiveness which the Bellinis never quite obtained, and an accuracy of minute



DÜRER  
THE PAINTER'S FATHER



HANS BALDUNG : A SENATOR



M. GRÜNEWALD : S. JOHN AND THE VIRGIN  
(Colmar)

## THE GERMAN SCHOOL

observation which Antonello did not possess. This portrait and, still more noticeably, the beautiful little female portrait at Berlin, have a greater breadth and suavity than many of Dürer's heads. His general practice when using paint approximates more nearly to that of the draughtsman (and what marvellous portrait drawings he has left us!), than to the plastic treatment appropriate to the regular painter in oils. So we must regard our portrait of *The Painter's Father* (1938) as a kind of drawing in oil colours. Its history is fairly complete from 1636, when it was presented to Charles I. by the city of Nuremberg with the *Portrait of the Artist*, now one of the glories of the Prado, for companion.

Few important pictures, even in these days of enlightenment and brotherly love, are added to the Gallery without an outcry being raised in some quarter as to their value or genuineness. But the reception accorded to this Dürer was unusually hostile, even for the 1904 period.<sup>1</sup> Time has assuaged these ancient controversies, and now through the mist, due to cracking and mending, which dims the portrait, Dürer's characteristic qualities emerge plainly. Compared with the works round it, the picture is not very striking at the first impression. The tone is very quiet, there is no forcible relief, and the contrasts of colour are not strong. Yet when we have considered it a little we find that the dull yellow and black of the dress, and the dull red

<sup>1</sup> The pros and cons of the discussion will be found in the *Burlington Magazine*, vol. iv. (Aug. and Sept., 1904), pp. 431-434, and 570-572.

## THE GERMAN SCHOOL

background, have a curiously stimulating quality. Like the similar chords of colour which we find in the prints of Koriusai, these harmonies outwardly so faint and autumnal have within them something that suggests the sinister vitality of a tiger or a leopard. And a similar intense vitality still burns in the old man's eyes, his shrunken lips (a marvel of delicate drawing), his sparse grey hair, and the firm yet extraordinarily subtle line of his wasted cheek. The rapid incisive marking of the wrinkles and veins about the eye, the long fold of the withered throat, the blunt fingers with their shrivelled nails, all are passages of minute observation which show the master. How swiftly too must the main forms of the cloak have been drawn in since the ground below appears to have been actually scraped as a firm pen stroke may scrape a sheet of paper! For a similar expression of the intense vitality which sometimes accompanies old age we have to go to Rembrandt.

We can perhaps most easily appreciate the mordant intensity of Dürer's portrait by turning to two admirable portraits in the same room by Hans BALDUNG. Look for example at the *Gentleman* (1232) so firmly and solidly, if somewhat coarsely, modelled, and you will see that it is by comparison lifeless. Turn again to the *Senator* (245), one of Baldung's finest works. The colour is so rich and harmonious, the treatment so broad, the drawing so masterly in the treatment of the hair and similar details, that the old ascription to Dürer, aided no doubt by a forged monogram and date, can easily be forgiven. But once more we find an entire

## THE GERMAN SCHOOL

lack of life in the presentment. If we are very charitable we may term the Senator dreamy in comparison with old Dürer ; but if we are quite honest we must see that he is really vacuous.

Yet Baldung was no mean artist. His *Dead Christ* (1427) is one of the grandest designs in the whole Gallery. As in some great Buddhist painting, the holy personages rise gigantic into the air far above the earth and their kneeling worshippers, their golden haloes making a noble pattern upon the sky of still paler gold and the masses of grey storm cloud. The unsubstantial and atmospheric quality of the Oriental paintings is, however, replaced by a firmness of touch which gives force and reality to the sorrowing figures, a reality no less appropriate to them than serene and aerial remoteness is appropriate to the Buddhistic vision. This degree of imaginative inspiration being rare in the German School, it would be unjust not to mention here such a conspicuous example of it as the great work at Colmar by Matthias Grünewald, where in one of the *Crucifixion* panels St. John, himself almost fainting with grief, supports the swooning Virgin in an embrace so tragic that Goya in his most passionate moments could not surpass it. And if Grünewald be named, we must not forget Albrecht Altdorfer, that lively painter and engraver, whose *Battle of Arbela* at Munich so captivated Napoleon that it was carried off and hung in his bathroom at St. Cloud.

Equally lively, and more professionally accomplished than Altdorfer, though of much less fanciful imagination, was Lucas CRANACH, court painter to the

## THE GERMAN SCHOOL

Saxon Electors. Living chiefly at Wittenberg, far from direct contact either with Germany or Italy, Cranach developed a style of his own in which we can only trace outside influences here and there. For instance in the large *Triptych*, one of the many purchases of that far-seeing collector the Prince Consort, and lent by H.M. the King, it is fairly clear that at some time or other Cranach must have seen the work of Dürer, and perhaps of Grünewald too. In this formal composition Cranach reveals a keen eye for character, notably in the dignified figure of the holy bishop S. Erasmus and the hard-featured S. George on the face of the shutter, accompanied with a singular sense of feminine charm, as in the graceful S. Barbara. These two qualities are constant with him. Our *Portrait of a Man* (1925), for example, will be found on examination to come not so far behind Dürer and Holbein in solidity of structure, in delicacy of workmanship, and quiet observation of personality. It bears some resemblance to the painter's friend Martin Luther, and represents perhaps a member of Luther's family.

The *Charity* (2925) is an excellent specimen of the type of picture with which the light-hearted artist was more commonly wont to regale his patrons. While treating the human form with a quaint realism which was rarely much influenced by the prevalent Italian canon of beauty, Cranach had a keen eye for the attractions of girlhood when it is merry and roguish. This blend of youthful freshness with playful humour is irresistible. Cranach seldom or never aims at grandeur, and not often or consciously at distinction; he



HANS BALDUNG  
THE DEAD CHRIST





JEALOUSY

LUCAS CRANACH



A MAN

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is no great colourist, though his colour is generally harmonious; yet he is one whose works we always welcome with pleasure. To call them pretty is unjust to their character and their wit: to dismiss them as merely quaint is unjust to their originality and to their very considerable technical skill. The *Jealousy* (3922), which came to the Gallery with the Mond Collection, is a most valuable complement to the pictures already discussed. Not only does it exhibit Cranach's charm, accomplishment and lively fancy in a more elaborate form than the *Charity*, but it indicates also that certain elements in his art were derived from Jacopo de' Barbari, the Veneto-Teuton who influenced Dürer. Indeed Dürer's engraving known as *Hercules* (B. 73) treats the same subject, with similar Italian traits. Yet if Jacopo de' Barbari in person, and prints like Pollaiuolo's *Battle of the Nudes*, were known to Cranach, his talent was not thereby diverted, but remains a thing wholly German, and of such things surely the most sprightly and engaging? We must, however, remember to accept attributions to Cranach with some reserve. Lucas founded a 'School' at Wittenberg of which his son was a prominent member. The works of the son, of pupils, and of assistants are many, and in them the charm of Lucas the elder degenerates into mere prettiness, his airy skill into coarseness or hardness or wiry mannerism. Our portrait of *A Lady* (291), for example, is a trifle more metallic in quality and more rigid in contour than the master's usual handiwork. These portraits of Saxon ladies were favourite products of the Cranach studio, and have earned the compliment

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of imitation in comparatively recent times, although these imitations with their crude vermilions and garish gilding, commonly attributed to Rohrich (active c. 1800), ought to deceive no one who has once learned to appreciate the true Cranach.

We need not spend time over Bartholomaus Bruyn, a capable painter of Cologne, influenced generally by the Flemings (2605), and in particular by Quinten Massys (3903), when we have Hans HOLBEIN to consider. A South German from Augsburg, working at first in Basle, he acquired a reputation not only by painting in oils, but by large wall decorations in fresco, and by designs for metalwork, stained glass and in particular for woodcuts. Holbein's *Dance of Death*, engraved on wood by Hans Lutzberger, is justly famous : some of the little prints, such as *Death and the Ploughman*, and *Death and the Child*, coming as near to perfection as human work can well do. But Holbein's powers as a portrait painter in time eclipsed his other talents. When he came to England, first to Sir Thomas More, then to the German Merchants of the Steelyard, and finally settled down as Court painter to Henry VIII., it was by portraiture, varied now and then by designs for metalwork, that he earned his living. England accordingly once contained the majority of his portraits : but these, one by one, have been taken from us by richer and more enterprising nations, and of the few which remain here the National Gallery contains no more than two.

One of them, in size at least, is among the most important of Holbein's extant products. And indeed



DEATH AND THE PLOUGHMAN



DEATH AND THE CHILD



HOLBEIN  
THE AMBASSADORS

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when we hear of two life-size standing figures painted by Holbein at the summit of his powers with many rich and curious accessories, we expect nothing less than a masterpiece. But a masterpiece *The Ambassadors* (1533) unfortunately is not. The colour has a Venetian fullness and variety ; everywhere we find examples of that ingenious and scrupulous craftsmanship which we associate with Holbein's name. The picture moreover is sound and in wonderful condition. Yet the elaborate design is a failure. The two figures are not really united by the groups of instruments which are piled on the stand between them, or by the anamorphosis of a skull, which seems to jump, rather oddly, from the mosaic pavement at their feet. In stature and physiognomy, too, the personages themselves are anything but imposing. Holbein, I think, must have been rather bored when he painted them, especially with George de Selve, Bishop of Lavaur, the heavy-looking young man on the right. Jean de Dinteville on the left is rather more interesting in face, and much more richly dressed, but even in his case Holbein has worked with conscientiousness rather than inspiration.

For there are times when Holbein's sense of form is so quickened, that his powers of drawing and painting reach a perfection beyond the conscious effort of a Van Eyck, a Raphael or a Dürer ; when the contour of a cheek, the modelling of a nose or lip, the drawing of an eye is carried out by some instinct for perfection which leaves us gasping at the result. Examples of this almost superhuman perfection are very rare ; much more frequently his texture is just a little hard, his

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contours just a little wiry. Occasionally he obtains effects of softness of tone similar to those of Joos van Cleef the younger, but much more varied and delicate. Van Cleef indeed is sometimes<sup>1</sup> mistaken for him. Occasionally too Holbein's work is comparatively coarse, either from want of interest, want of time, or perhaps from the want of a satisfactory drawing. His pictures were usually based on careful drawings which have long been accepted as models of what judgment, skill and economy of means can effect in portraiture. His miniatures remain the supreme examples of their kind. Altogether Holbein is a far more varied artist than the general similarity of appearance in his portraits would lead us at first sight to suppose. The difficulty of estimating the quality of any newly found specimen of his work is increased by the fact (though we have no historical proof of it) that he kept a studio in London where versions of his portraits were made from his drawings, or under his supervision. That studio was the cradle of painting in England, and no gap in our art history is more regrettable than our complete ignorance of its inmates and its contents when it came to an end; with Holbein himself, in the plague of 1543.

Controversy over the personages represented in *The Ambassadors* gave that picture great prominence for some years, until a discovery made by Miss Mary F. S. Hervey settled the question once for all. Our other Holbein portrait, *Christina Duchess of Milan* (2475), achieved even greater notoriety. For nearly thirty years it had hung in the Gallery as a loan from

<sup>1</sup> As in the fine portrait in the Prado, No. 2182.

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the Duke of Norfolk, until it had acquired the status almost of a national possession. Then in 1909 an offer of some £60,000 was made for the picture. All attempts to raise such a sum by public appeals had produced no more than £20,000, when at the eleventh hour, just as the picture was on the point of passing to an American purchaser, a lady who remains anonymous provided the National Art-Collections Fund with the remaining £40,000 and saved the picture for England.

The 'Norfolk' Holbein was worth saving. The charms of the Duchess are perhaps a little exaggerated in popular talk; two at least of Holbein's sitters have a rare and wistful beauty to which Christina can proffer no claim. The workmanship, too, though as firm and refined as we well could ask, has not that almost super-human perfection to which the master occasionally attained. The inspiration here has gone to the design, which in its dignity and simplicity is unique in European art. No such single figure was conceived by Titian or by Velazquez even. Not until we make acquaintance with the portraiture of China and Japan do we meet again with a formula so majestic and serene. It is unlucky that the tone of the picture should be so low, because the glazing necessary to protect the surface from continual exposure to the London atmosphere necessarily interferes with our perfect enjoyment of the pattern. Yet the narrow panel, in which the princess stands facing us so naturally, is seen at once to be something distinct and apart from anything else in the Gallery. The hands, the face, the white ruffles about

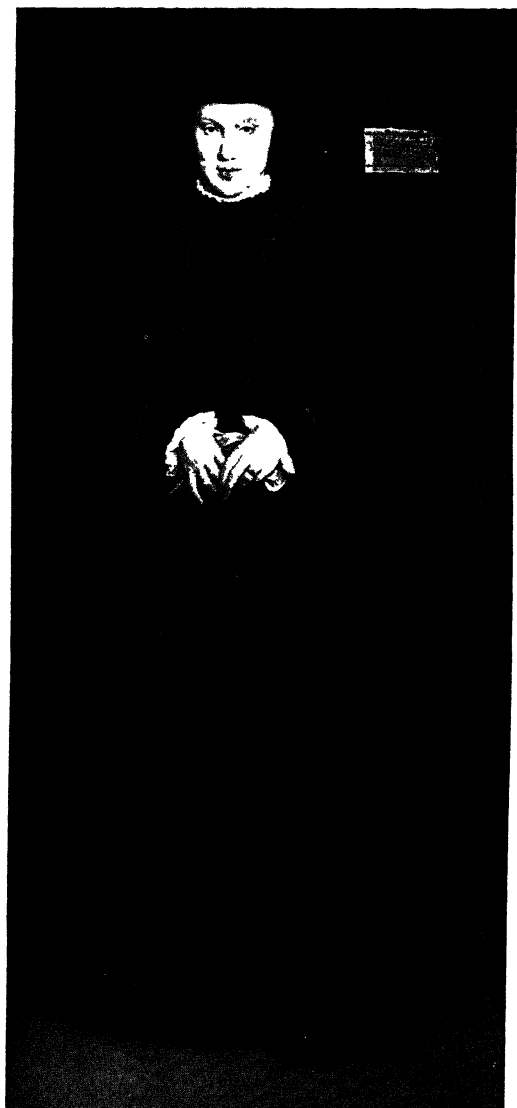


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them, and the *cartellino*, fixed to the wall with red sealing wax, provide the lighter reliefs. The setting of the black dress against the dark blue wall and the brown floor is effected with so fine a taste and so just a sense of proportion (the very things lacking in *The Ambassadors*), that we instinctively transfer some of these qualities to the lady herself, and read into her thoughtful eyes some charm which they may not in themselves quite warrant. The hands toying with the glove are marvellously observed; indeed if we trust the record that the Duchess gave Holbein only one sitting of three hours, the whole thing becomes a miracle. But Holbein is one of the few artists who have something of the miraculous about them.

The invention of Dürer, as we have seen, was essentially linear. Except in the short period when he came under the spell of the Venetians, form existed for him only as something which could be constructed with lines, with strokes of the pen or the graver or the brush, laid in orderly deliberate succession, indicating by their direction the projection or the recession of the object delineated, and adding by their precision and their spirit a new attractiveness to it. The result, when combined with Dürer's faculty of creative design and intensely serious purpose, is a long series of prints and drawings which in their way are unique. His paintings are wonderful too, but less consistent in quality, because painting deals primarily with masses and spaces rather than with lines.

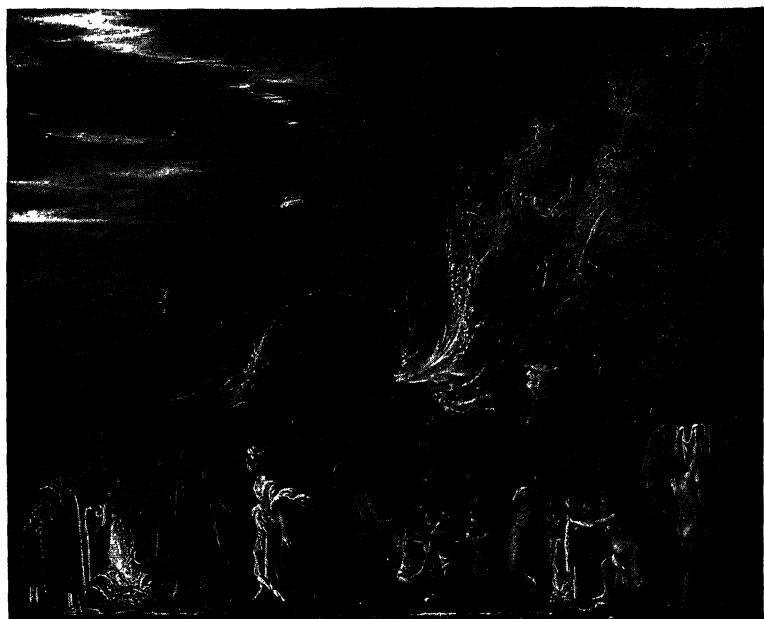
The genius of Holbein was far more truly pictorial. Like some of the greatest of the Florentines, he fol-



HOLBEIN  
CHRISTINA, DUCHESS OF MILAN



ADAM ELSHEIMER : TOBIAS AND THE ANGEL



ADAM ELSHEIMER : SHIPWRECK OF S. PAUL

## THE GERMAN SCHOOL

lowed, whether consciously or not, a sculptural ideal, and that ideal was the ideal of bas-relief, the ideal most perfectly adapted, as we saw in the previous volume, to presenting form in combination with fine colour. No Italian carried the ideal of low relief further than Holbein, or modelled with gradations of tone more infinitely delicate. His portraits, in which alone this practice is consistently employed, attain thereby the tenderness of great sculpture, coupled with a sculptor's firmness in rendering contour, a characteristic which, if alien to our modern ideas of atmospheric envelopment, is naturally favourable to design. And Holbein's sense of design, both in balance of mass and of colour, which he used with the superb mastery of one nurtured in a fine tradition, was on a par with his sense of form. Like Velazquez or Vermeer, in his best moments he can place a figure within the picture area with just that proportion of spaces and accessories which we feel to be impeccable. His grasp of human character, and the craft with which he can render in paint even the minutest trait which his eye can see, might be thought to come rather from the perfection of his physical sight than from that spiritual and intellectual searching beneath appearances for the very soul of the sitter which a portrait by Rembrandt suggests.

But Holbein's eye was no frigid optical instrument. On the contrary some sympathetic response from the sitter, some charm of person, some strong trait of character, was needed to rouse his powers to full activity. When his subject is dull and unattractive the actual quality of Holbein's work follows suit and

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loses much of its spirit and tenderness ; when beauty or character appeals to him he can paint like one inspired. So under a mask of technical similarity, Holbein is more various, and much more unequal, than common repute or dealers' valuations would suggest. Far from being the most consistent of painters he is one of the most temperamental.

A long interval both of years and skill separates Holbein from Adam ELSHEIMER. Yet by an accident of time and place the less gifted man was to exercise an influence upon the arts out of all proportion to his aesthetic achievement. A painter of little pictures, mostly on copper, elaborately finished in the petty style of the followers of Brueghel, was to be an inspiration to the greatest artists of his own time, and through them to ours. At the age of twenty Elsheimer left his native Frankfort for Venice where, under his eclectic fellow-countryman Rottenhammer, he learned to admire Tintoretto. Our *Baptism of Christ* (3904) illustrates the good use which he made of this admiration. Two years later Elsheimer came to Rome, where the Flemish landscapes of Paul Bril were the fashion. From these Elsheimer learned a little : from the Carracci and from Caravaggio he learned still more. We might expect that a style composed of so many divergent elements would be wholly vapid ; we must admit that the form in which it was expressed was insignificant. Yet the man was of a temper so ingenious that he overcame the crushing initial disadvantages of eclectic imagery and a trivial method. Our *Martyrdom of S. Lawrence* (1014), for example, is a compound of

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many things, none of them very striking or novel, except perhaps the fresh and vigorous lighting. Yet upon this type of picture Lastman and Pynas founded their manner of designing, a manner which they passed on to the youthful Rembrandt.

With our *Tobias and the Angel* (1424) relations with Rembrandt become still closer. This picture was engraved by Goudt; Goudt's engraving was copied in an etching by that remarkable artist Hercules Seghers; the etched plate by Seghers was taken by Rembrandt and transformed into a *Flight into Egypt* (Hind 266). An equally close connexion with Rembrandt is indicated by Elsheimer's drawings. Some of them executed in pen and bistre anticipate the manner, the effects and almost the very spirit of Rembrandt himself. The drawings, indeed, are the side of Elsheimer's art to which the modern painter will still turn with the most unqualified pleasure.

Rembrandt was a boy when Elsheimer died. Rubens was his contemporary, his admirer, and a purchaser of his works. In our tiny *Shipwreck of S. Paul* (3535) we can recognize, on a microscopic scale, many of the elements of 'Landscape with Figures' which Rubens afterwards employed so grandly. The groups huddling round the fires, the masses of wind-swept foliage, the distant sea with the pharos flaming on the headland above it and, in particular, the bursts of light through the stormy sky, are all of them motives which recall the great Fleming. This contrast of artificial illumination with the more sensational aspects of nature, with sunrise or sunset, with starlight or moonlight, was one

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of Elsheimer's most characteristic preferences, so that most subsequent landscapes of dramatic effect may claim him as their ancestor. We may trace the germ of this preference back to the landscapes of Altdorfer and Grünewald. In Elsheimer the same Teutonic fancy blossoms again, after lying dormant for a century, and bears fruit for all civilized Europe.

Nor was that the end of his achievements. His walks about Rome led him into the Campagna, and by sketching there he inaugurated that type of 'classical' landscape, with figures and trees and ruins, which Claude, who came to Rome in the year of Elsheimer's untimely death, was afterwards to develop. So through Claude, Elsheimer becomes a spiritual ancestor for Wilson and Turner and Corot, as well as for Rubens and Rembrandt. True, he furnished little more than the bare bones of this art. The subtleties of atmospheric tone and colour were first studied and mastered (so far as we may use the term of anything over which we are still puzzling and disputing) by his successors. That however is no reason for denying to Elsheimer his laurel, especially if we compare him with such men as Dietrich (see No. 205), the next German figure on our roll, whose ability is associated almost entirely with imitating greater men. In fact, until we come to Rethel and Menzel in the nineteenth century, the modern artist will probably not find much to interest him in Germany. The old German artistic fertility was exhausted by the epoch of Dürer and Holbein, and Elsheimer is the posthumous infant.

PART III  
THE SPANISH SCHOOL





## CHAPTER XIII

### EL GRECO

BOTH in Italy and the Netherlands the arts develop with a certain stately progression. Even their declination, if much more rapid than their growth, proceeds with a similar steadiness. Successive generations of highly gifted men, handing on as it were the torch of life, introduce new motives and new methods into painting until a climax is attained. That supreme moment once passed, the subsidence follows in a no less orderly course. But in Spain this regular flow and ebb of inspiration is not seen. The general tendency of the school is imitative and eclectic; its general level of accomplishment lower than that of the best work which was being done elsewhere. But from this confused and, it must be confessed, not very inspiring average, there emerge suddenly and at considerable intervals of time three remarkable personalities—Greco, Velazquez and Goya.

The influence of these personalities upon modern painting has been so profound and far-reaching that Spain in contemporary thought ranks artistically with Italy and France. Yet the Spanish Rooms at the

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National Gallery would not convey this impression to the casual visitor. Their first aspect is sombre, if not actually gloomy. The general tone of the pictures is dark with little positive colour. The subjects are either portraits, or for the most part devotional themes of a type which has now no profound interest for us. It would be difficult to name any section of the Gallery more remote in appearance from the brightness and variety which the contemporary painter so generally seeks.

Spanish painting begins gaily enough, with strong colours, bold rough work and plentiful gilding, but these primitive panels, usually built up in massive frames behind the altars, tier upon tier, are not represented at Trafalgar Square. Excellent specimens, however, are preserved in the Cook Collection at Richmond. Then follows a century or more of imitation, first of Flemish models, then of Italian ones. The *Adoration of the Magi* (3417A) will illustrate the former phase: the latter had in general more contemptible if less primitive results. Morales (1229) was redeemed by an intense pietistic sincerity from the worst effects of this artistic servitude. Indeed now and then he develops a largeness of design which renders his work impressive in spite of an oily technique and overcharged sentiment. But neither Morales nor any other of his Spanish contemporaries has a living interest for us comparable to that which we feel for one who was not a Spaniard, either by birth or by training, and who though adopted by Spain is still called universally EL GRECO.

## EL GRECO

Domenico Theotocopoulos was indeed Greek by nationality. Born at Candia in Crete, he probably derived his boyish feeling for art from Byzantine sources. In an ikon of the sixteenth century which was procured in that island, representing *Christ and S. Mary Magdalene* (3961), we can see Greco's angels and Greco's type of Christ quite clearly foreshadowed. We need not therefore speculate whether his extraordinary art was of still more remote origin, and descended from the painters who worked in the Minoan palaces.

From Crete Greco came at an early age to study painting in Venice. Though an extant document describes him as a pupil of Titian, Greco's early work bears no resemblance to Titian's, but has an affinity with Tintoretto, and even more with Jacopo Bassano. Indeed several works of the School of Bassano show so close a likeness to Greco's types and colouring as to make it almost certain that the youthful Greco worked for a time under Bassano's eye. A glance at the large painting by Bassano of *Christ driving the Traders from the Temple* (228) will reveal both types and technical methods singularly like those of Greco in his early years, the long brush strokes and the peculiar tones of vinous red being specially noticeable.

About the year 1575, when Greco was thirty years of age, he came to Spain and settled in Toledo, where he lived and worked till his death in 1614. By the time that he left Italy his artistic aims and methods were clearly defined. His work becomes broader and

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more daring as time goes by, but to the last Greco remains a Venetian painter, a follower of Tintoretto and Bassano, who continues to sign his pictures in Greek characters and calls himself a Cretan. That the soil of Spain was friendly to the development of his genius we may guess from the length of his residence there, as from the very considerable mass of painting which he produced we may guess that the fervour of the Spanish attitude towards religion was more sympathetic to his temper than the comparative laxity of Venice. If Spain cannot claim Greco as a native, she at least accepted his painting with a welcome which would probably not have been extended to it anywhere else in Europe, and so deserves the honour which now accrues to her through him.

The study of Greco's work is by no means simple. Very few documents relating to him have hitherto been discovered, and though in a general way it is not difficult to separate works of his youth from those of his old age, he had a disconcerting habit of painting version after version of the same composition, often at considerable intervals of time. For example. Our little portrait of an ecclesiastic, No. 1122, is entitled *Luigi Cornaro*, from the inscription on the book before him, "L. Cornaro, Aet. Suae 100, 1566." If this inscription were genuine it would indicate that by the age of twenty-one Greco was already an exceedingly accomplished and original portrait painter. But other variants and versions exist without the inscription, in which the sitter seems clearly intended for S. Jerome. Also the date of 1566 seems too early for the style of



BYZANTINE : CHRIST AND THE MAGDALEN (DETAIL)





GRECO : CHRIST DRIVING THE TRADERS FROM THE TEMPLE  
(Cook Collection)



GRECO : CHRIST DRIVING THE TRADERS FROM THE TEMPLE (1457)

## EL GRECO

the painting. There exists at Bayonne a preliminary study from life from which this portrait is evidently derived, and the study is in the manner of Greco's last years in Venice between 1570 and 1575. Moreover our picture is not the work of one fresh from apprenticeship to a Tintoretto or a Bassano; it is an entirely new and personal creation. There is a certain Venetian savour about the colouring, yet neither the general pose nor the admirably modelled head has the least connexion with any painter but Greco. The hands in particular with their slender pointed fingers have no resemblance to the hands of other artists. And we know quite a number of pictures painted by Greco in Venice that are not individual in this way; that are clearly reminiscent of Tintoretto or Bassano, that are unequal in workmanship, and have neither the breadth of style nor the certainty of touch which this portrait displays. The inscription then is almost certainly apocryphal. What is more important for us here is the vigour and vitality of the portrait, the keen glance of the eye, the insight into the sitter's temper and character, and the masterly directness with which the head is modelled. It is not surprising that Greco in later life should prove himself to be a portrait painter whose best works can hold their own even in the company of Velazquez, and few additions to the Gallery would be more welcome than a first-rate example of this aspect of his genius.

*Christ driving the Traders from the Temple* (1457) is less closely worked, and may therefore be a little later in date. A comparison with Bassano's treatment of



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the same subject previously mentioned will illustrate Greco's independence, and his superiority as a designer too. Both pictures are full of movement, as befits the subject. Bassano's colour is masterly, and the figure of Christ wielding the scourge is given due prominence above the huddled figures below by relief against a background of darkness, convenient as a foil, but perilous to the general tone.

Greco's picture at first sight might seem less effective for want of this contrast; yet as we look at it we find it not only more full of light and action, but full of subtleties of design such as Bassano never dreamed of. These subtleties are no mere geometry: though the modern critical analyst will find in them geometry enough, if he looks for it. Their purpose is to enhance the effect of Christ's sudden action, by suggesting (as Bassano had not done) the surprise and resistance which it occasioned. We can trace the development of this purpose from two earlier versions of the subject. First comes that in the Cook Collection at Richmond which is full of memories of Tintoretto and Paul Veronese. Next comes that in the Collection of Lord Yarborough, much more broadly and characteristically handled, but retaining the general features of the old composition, with the addition of four portrait heads of Titian, Michelangelo, Giulio Clovio, and Raphael (?) in the immediate foreground.

In our picture, and in a still later version, now in the Frick Collection, the proportion of the figure group to the background is increased, so that the sense of vitality and action is heightened, and the design made

## EL GRECO

more compact. The raised arm of the figure to the left is outstretched to echo and emphasize the swing of Christ's body. A buxom Venetian lady sitting placidly in the foreground of the earlier versions is replaced by the stooping young man and overthrown table. The group of spectators to the right, instead of talking placidly together, are now made parties to the disturbance, by the support which the lines of their arms and cloaks give to the uplifted arm of Christ. In the earlier versions of the subject the elements of these emphatic compositional devices are present, but are obscured by figures and details (such as bird cages and pied rabbits) which, though they may help to illustrate the story, are quite irrelevant to the design.

As Greco's genius developed he concentrated more and more upon Movement, sacrificing to this ideal not only all the ordinary illustrative material which his fellow craftsmen employed, but also that respect for normal proportion and substance which the Italian Renaissance painters had as a whole so consistently maintained. The sense of Volume Greco retained, for movement must have force behind it. Colour he retained, for colour he saw to be a potent stimulant and, if used as he could use it, a vehicle instinct with life and motion. Form, however, was his chief weapon; and the forms he chose were those of the most lively of the elements—fire. His limbs and draperies flow and toss with the rippling movement of flames; his colours flicker and flash like flames; there is something flamelike even in the long undulating strokes of his

## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

brush.<sup>1</sup> So entirely does he come to subordinate natural appearances to this mode of vision that he might have become the most empty of mannerists, or a maker of mere abstractions, had he not been gifted above measure with the eye of a great portrait painter and with a fervid religious imagination. In virtue of these qualities the things which Greco created never lack substance and 'content,' so that he was able to satisfy the exacting and enthusiastic devotees of his own time, and still to be for us the most conspicuous champion of the creed of pure aesthetics which Europe has hitherto produced.

Even those who are repelled by what seems extravagance and distortion in Greco's work cannot deny its extraordinary power. No painter is more intensely alive. From one end of his canvases to the other every touch suggests movement. Yet since men and angels, earth and sky, are rendered with symbols of the same character, albeit so sensitive and vibrant that they are never monotonous, Greco's designs always possess Unity as well as Vitality. And they possess Infinity too; indeed few painters can rival Greco either in vigour of invention or in subtlety of colour and design. We can hardly hope to possess in England any of his greatest works, like those which are among the chief artistic treasures of Spain. Some of their quality can be guessed from photographs, but no impression of them is complete which does not record their colour,

<sup>1</sup> We are reminded of the phrase attributed to Michelangelo: "A figure should be pyramidal, *Serpentine* and multiplied by one, two and three." See also vol. i. pp. 39, 64, 84, on the significance of flamelike forms.

## EL GRECO

with its harmonies of dark green and vinous red, its audacious contrasts of lemon yellow and deep greenish blue, of livid white and intense black, and its curious purple-grey flesh tones.

Our *Agony in the Garden* (3476) affords another illustration of the labours to which Greco submitted in order to attain a perfect solution of these unexplored aesthetic problems. The design belongs to the last decade of his life. He began with an upright composition in which S. John and S. Peter are shown asleep in the foreground while Christ and the Angel are seen on the rising ground above them. Evidently the division of the subject into two groups of approximately equal size did not satisfy the artist. He tried it no less than three times, on each occasion making some improvement in the rhythm of the design, and in the third version, a picture at Lille, with considerable success. But the division between the two figures below and the two figures above was still unbridged. In our picture Greco makes a daring innovation. He takes the two sleeping Apostles out of the foreground, reduces them to pigmies, adds a figure of St. James, and tucks them all away in a hollow of the swirling cloud under the Angel. We may think them oddly placed, and quite out of scale with the two primary figures; but the design is now completely unified, nothing now distracts the eye from the principal motive.

The figure of the kneeling Christ occupies the centre of the composition, accentuated by draperies of blue and vivid red, and by the peaked rock which rises

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flamelike behind him. A rising bank to the right, continued by the line of the bridge across which Judas and the soldiers are advancing, and to the left the sloping bough in the garden paling, emphasize the base line of the draperies, and make a stable foundation for the figure. The line to the left merges into the circular sweep of the cloud on which the Angel advances, a sweep which has almost the effect of a breaking wave. This curve is admirably foiled by the curves of the cloud above, which the wings of the angel repeat and accentuate. Then to the right, across an expanse of dark sky, we have a second series of swirling cloud forms with the half-veiled moon in the hollow beneath. The balance and opposition of these strange celestial masses, and their unearthly colour (the dark sky is a positive brown), envelop the whole scene in a wild supernatural atmosphere, no less appropriate perhaps to this moment of tragedy than the intense human sympathy with which Rembrandt was to invest it half a century later.<sup>1</sup> The visionary landscape to the left of the picture of *S. Peter* (lent by the Bowes Museum) shows the same mysterious atmosphere, the same harmony and counterpoise of flamelike shapes. This picture too is no hasty improvisation, but one of some half-dozen variants through which the painter felt his way to more complete unity. Greco, it must be remembered, was a pioneer in a field which even to-day we have only begun to reconnoitre, and we can hardly be surprised if he found his task one

<sup>1</sup> In the etching of 1657 (Hind 293) and drawings, e.g. H. de G. 344 and 991.



GRECO : AGONY IN THE GARDEN (3476)



AGONY IN THE GARDEN  
(From Sigüenza)



S. PETER  
(Bowes Museum)

GRECO

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which with all his genius he could not immediately master.

The condition of the painting calls for a moment's notice. Most of Greco's work has suffered more or less, being dessicated by the Spanish climate, if not dulled by altar candles, old varnish and injudicious cleaning. Our picture had hung in a convent where it has gradually become covered with a thick accumulation of rather greasy dirt. This dirt seems to have protected the paint from climatic injury, as the resulting obscurity protected it from the attentions of the cleaner. When at last the dirt was removed, the surface beneath was found to be in a state of quite exceptional freshness and brilliancy.

In the previous volume of this work (pp. 121-124), when considering Parmigiano, we saw the supreme importance of rhythmic congruity in the logic of pure design. Now Greco in this respect is unique among European artists. Whatever our attitude towards his painting, we must admit its complete aesthetic consistency. His symbols maintain a perfect harmony with each other and with the general design. They are also uncommonly vivid and alive. The very high place accorded to Greco by modern criticism is thus aesthetically justified. To many this will be a hard saying. The camera-trained layman may feel that what he has been taught to regard as 'Nature,' ought not to be so wholly subordinated to artistic expression as we find it subordinated in Greco's work. He would admit perhaps that what seems to him there to be distortion, or extravagance, has nevertheless a sort of



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expressive quality when applied to the supernatural subjects which Greco affected, although it would seem wholly inapplicable to modern subjects and modern conditions.

Yet these values of Movement and Colour into which Greco translated appearances, are values which the artist cannot disregard. As we have seen, Greco's painting attains through them a Vitality and an Unity which even those who most dislike it have to allow. The modern painter may not unreasonably argue that there is to-day little of that fervid devotional feeling, that passionate faith in the supernatural, which inspired Greco and his audience in sixteenth-century Spain. The theatre and the opera house give us perhaps the nearest contemporary parallels, and would seem to afford a sufficiently fertile ground for experiment. Van Gogh has shown that in flower painting, as in landscape, methods akin to those of Greco may be used with extraordinary effect. Nevertheless the schematization of artistic symbols, when carried as far as Greco and Van Gogh have carried it, is never likely to win much contemporary favour. It involves a more drastic recasting of natural appearances than the average mind can view without suspicion, although it is a direct way of escape from the deadness of photographic realism. So the painter who does not at least keep this schematization in mind will have to be exceptionally gifted if he is to avoid being commonplace. On the other hand, if he does absorb the general principles underlying Greco's work he may with luck become a true creative artist. It is interesting to note how

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William Blake discovered for himself a method akin to Greco's. From want of professional training he was unable to apply his principles with the same consistent success as the Cretan, but at his best, as in some of the illustrations to the Book of Job, Blake may rank with the greatest.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

GRECO working in comparative isolation at Toledo had little effect upon his fellow artists, and it is not till after his death in 1614 that we find echoes of his art in the work of Velazquez. Before discussing that great master, one or two lesser men must be mentioned. Ribalta, who was Greco's contemporary, need not detain us, unless the picture of *S. Paul* (3590) should prove to be his work. This painting, if more admirable in conception than in execution, is of some interest. The pose of the figure corresponds in reverse so closely with that of Whistler's famous *Portrait of his Mother* in the Luxembourg, that we cannot help asking ourselves whether the modern picture is not really derived either from the old one or from Jacob de Gheyn's rare engraving of it. The correspondence of colour and tone suggests that the painting and not the engraving was Whistler's model, unless, indeed, the resemblance is merely an astounding coincidence. Either picture might serve as an example of what in art is meant by Repose. The simple silhouette of our *S. Paul* with its large contours, the general tones of black and grey

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

with the least possible relief from positive colour, the broad treatment of the masses of the dress, the plain background, all unite to emphasize the utter quiet which surrounds the aged saint. This quiet, this breadth, this simplicity, we are accustomed to associate, as Whistler associated them, with the name of Velazquez. But since this picture was engraved before 1616, that is to say when Velazquez was still a boy, we must admit that the formula which he afterwards used so superbly, in combination with other fine qualities, had already been recognized and employed by an earlier Spanish painter, as to whose identity we are at present uncertain.<sup>1</sup>

Jusepe RIBERA was a much more important artist than his master Ribalta. Leaving Spain he went to Italy, where after many struggles he attained to fame and settled at Naples. Becoming a prominent member of the Neapolitan artistic society, under the nickname of "Lo Spagnoletto," he gained an unenviable repute for jealousy of his brother artists, notably of Massimo Stanzioni, whose admirable *Mourning over the Dead Christ* (3401) we have already discussed (vol. i. pp. 131, 132). And indeed our impressive *Dead Christ* (235), attributed to Ribera, is in its technical character singularly close to Stanzioni's work. The smooth modelling of the limbs and faces, and the deep noble colour notes of orange and dark blue and green and

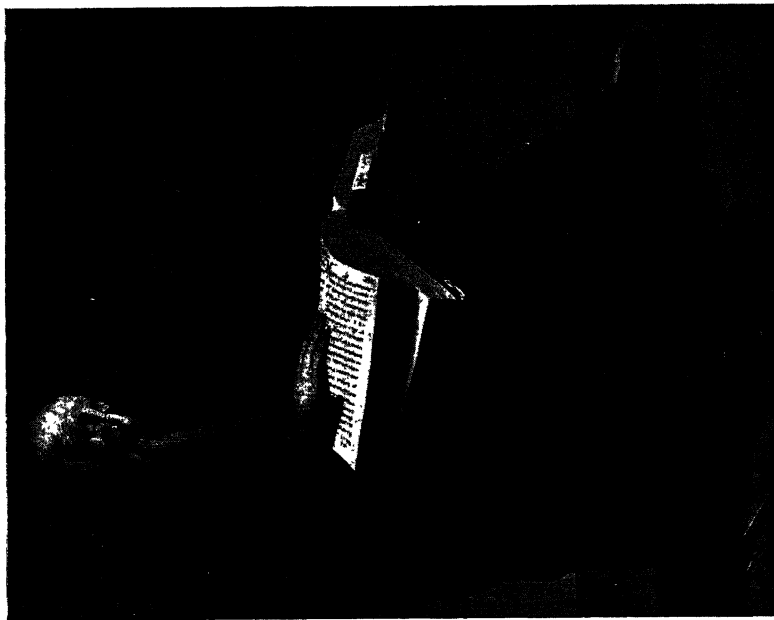
<sup>1</sup> I suggest the name of Ribalta because the painting of the hands resembles that in Ribalta's *S. Peter*, exhibited at Burlington House in 1919 (No. 45). The late Sir Claude Phillips was of the same opinion. The Spanish authorities consider that the picture belongs to the School of Madrid.

## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

brown recall that unequal and much underrated master rather than Ribera. Ribera is at least as powerful an executant as Stanzioni, but he has a manner of his own, which is almost always recognizable : the stroke of the brush being visible as it follows the forms, or bridges the transition from light to shadow. In our picture the modelling is smoother and more typically Italian. Ribera's colour too is generally limited to oppositions of flesh colour, with perhaps some brown and crimson, to a sky of blue with white clouds. Stanzioni on the other hand is a colourist of remarkable power and variety. If therefore No. 235 be from Ribera's brush, it is an exception to the great body of his work.<sup>1</sup>

Ribera's name, however, is attached with justice to the *Shepherd with a Lamb* (244). It possesses his technical characteristics, but old damages and dark varnish, added to a rather commonplace design, make the canvas too dull and dismal for detailed notice. Yet Ribera was a serious artist of great power. As a figure draughtsman he is the only Spaniard, except Velazquez, who can hold his own with the best Italians of his day, and with the Italians perhaps we ought to include him, since the greater part of his life was spent in Italy, and all his art was learned in Rome and Naples. In his best pictures an audacious contrast of large forms and a striking use of opposed diagonals invest him with a certain freshness of design, and he could paint

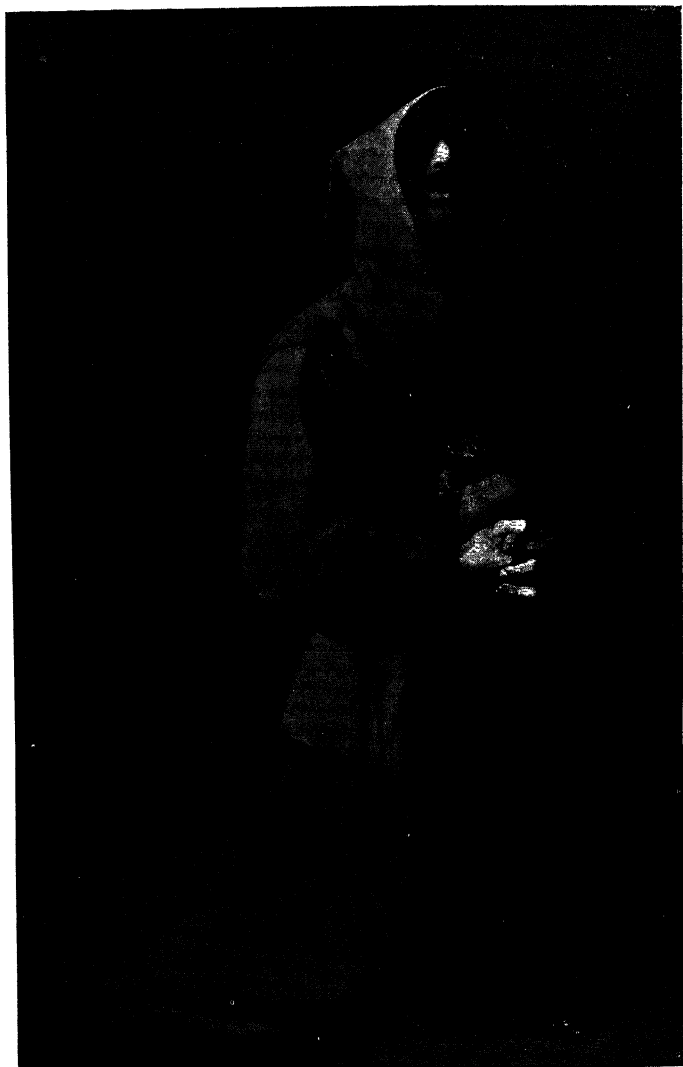
<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written, the removal of some of the discoloured varnish from the surface of this painting revealed the forms more clearly. There could no longer be any doubt that the work was Stanzioni's, and it was therefore removed to its proper place among the Italians.



SPANISH SCHOOL : S. PAUL



WHISTLER  
PORTRAIT OF HIS MOTHER



ZURBARAN  
A FRANCISCAN

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

a single head with a fine if rather murky realism. Yet his invention was limited, so that although an artist can learn something from a specimen of Ribera's craftsmanship, his chief claim to notice here is the fact that he was one of the principal channels by which the 'Naturalist' style of Caravaggio was conveyed to Spain during the first half of the seventeenth century.

While Ribera was working in Rome in 1615, two young painters, afterwards to become famous as Zurbaran and Velazquez, were starting their artistic career in Seville. Of the two Francisco ZURBARAN was the elder by about a year. The son of a peasant, he seems the complete embodiment of one type of the native Spanish character in his steady realism and his austere devotional gravity. Possibly it was from the companionship of the young Velazquez that his realism aims at and frequently attains a high level, even in his early works. Yet as a craftsman he is disconcertingly unequal. When he and Velazquez were working side by side, though in different studios, each seems to learn much from the other. The memory of Zurbaran's tones of brown and orange survives with Velazquez up to the time of his first journey to Italy in 1629. Zurbaran's own realistic bent was made more searching and intense by contact with the keener perceptions, the finer gifts of hand and eye, which Velazquez showed in his 'bodegone' pieces. Once or twice, as we shall see, the relation between the two is so intimate that criticism is still in disagreement as to whether a painting is an early work by Velazquez, or an exceptional piece by Zurbaran.



## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

Fortunately we can estimate Zurbaran's spirit and Zurbaran's craftsmanship in one of his masterpieces. Our *Franciscan* (230) has long been famous. Much of Zurbaran's thought was occupied with the monkish orders: the Carthusians in their white robes making, it would seem, from the frequency with which he has painted them, a special appeal to him. But never has he created a more profoundly impressive figure than this kneeling Franciscan, gazing upwards from the hollow of his cowl with an almost savage self-abandonment. It is a figure worthy of Rembrandt, though Rembrandt would have painted a brooding spirit, as he has done in our *Capuchin* (166), not a soul absorbed as this one in sombre ecstasy. It is an epitome of the fervour of Spanish asceticism, and a masterpiece of painting too. Not only is the design of singular simplicity and power, but the solidity and substance of the workmanship are such as Zurbaran rarely achieved. Look for instance at the sleeve, and the hands. The hands are notable, because Zurbaran does not as a rule paint the hand even tolerably. He makes it too small; with men the fingers are nerveless and squarish, in the case of women they are entirely feeble. The masses of the robe too are treated with unusual fullness and ease. Zurbaran's draperies commonly tend to be dry and stiff, to be crumpled rather than folded; indeed his sense of form is naturally hard and thin. Only on very rare occasions was he able to escape from these innate defects, either when painting a single figure, as in our picture, or in parts of his more elaborate compositions. I do not remember any large work by

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

him in which his peculiar weaknesses do not show somewhere.

Our second example of Zurbaran, *A Lady as S. Margaret* (1930) is one of a series of portraits of Sevillian girls with saintly attributes. Here S. Margaret's dragon is but a dimly seen shape in the dark background. The lady's smart costume of black and white and scarlet, her sandalled feet, her large dark eyes, and her rather pretty face (which looks as if it were powdered and rouged) have clearly been the painter's chief care. The portrait remains a popular favourite, but as painting it cannot be compared for one moment with the *Franciscan*. The work is everywhere lacking both in quality and substance: the lady's foolish little hands, for example, will illustrate what I have said of Zurbaran's failings in this respect. But though as an artist he is imperfect and unequal, such an obvious honesty and sincerity shines through all Zurbaran's work that we welcome it, wherever we see it, as that of an original if rather gloomy and monkish friend, who among men and women of the world is always a trifle awkward.

It is necessary to dwell in some little detail upon these characteristics of Zurbaran's style, because his work is still occasionally confused with that of VELAZQUEZ, and unless we know Zurbaran's peculiarities and limitations we may not easily distinguish between the two. Velazquez begins life at Seville as the pupil of the ill-tempered Herrera the Elder, but soon passes to the studio of the mild and kindly Pacheco. Herrera's manner of painting was no less rude than his temper,

## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

and Velazquez stayed with him but a short time. Yet a memory of Herrera's rough types and coarse forcible method survives in the work of Velazquez right up to the period of *Los Borrachos*, when Velazquez was a man of thirty, firmly established in the royal favour at Madrid. Under Pacheco's eye, the young Velazquez applied this solid strong technical practice to the painting of "bodegones," kitchen scenes, which were then fashionable at Seville, and which involved a close study of figures and 'still-life' from nature. More than half a dozen of these early works are now known, and from them we can estimate the gradual process by which Velazquez developed his great natural talent.

Judged by its comparative clumsiness our *Christ in the House of Martha* (1375) must be one of the earliest of these experiments. The 'still-life' in the picture, the fish, the platters, the eggs, the garlic and the brass mortar are painted with wonderful ability; the fish in particular could hardly be better done. But the composition is awkward, the chief figures are heavy, the lighting is uncertain, and the treatment shows many signs of inexperience. The ugly hands should be noticed, with their stubby blunt fingers and coarse red colouring: we shall find them again and again in the painter's later work. Equally characteristic is the effort, here not wholly successful, to give substance to the draperies by carefully rounding their folds, a roundness in strong contrast to the general dryness and stiffness of Zurbaran. A slightly later picture of *An Old Woman frying Eggs*, in the Cook Collection at Richmond, exhibits the same features, but is marked



VELAZQUEZ : CHRIST IN THE HOUSE OF MARTHA



VELAZQUEZ : CHRIST AT THE COLUMN



VELAZQUEZ  
ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

by a considerable increase in accomplishment and knowledge, particularly in the matter of lighting. The background of our picture is hardly less interesting than its foreground, for the group in the inner room is clearly painted under the influence of Greco, an influence which flashes out occasionally in the master's later portraits, and once actually inspires an important composition. The design of the *Coronation of the Virgin* in the Prado, into which Velazquez has put some of his noblest work, is taken wholesale from a painting of the subject by Greco. This can be studied in the same Museum, to which it was recently bequeathed by Don Pablo Bosch. Greco was, however, too remote in temper from such a convinced realist as Velazquez, to be more than an intermittent interest. The Italian 'Naturalists,' Bassano, and his slightly older contemporary, Zurbaran were more to his taste.

These influences explain our large *Adoration of the Shepherds* (232), for which the traditional attribution to Velazquez deserves to be restored. The names of the almost unknown Pablo Legote, of the mediocre though learned Pacheco, and of Zurbaran, have been suggested in connexion with the picture. Since Zurbaran's authorship was supported by the formidable opinion of Señor Aureliano de Beruete, we cannot dismiss it lightly. But with the hints we have already gathered as to the progress and capacities of these two young painters, the issue ought not long to remain in doubt. The head, arm and draperies of the Madonna are indeed very like similar passages in certain works by Zurbaran, but the workmanship is more firm, the

## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

sense of form more complete, the resemblance not inexplicable when two young painters were making experiments side by side in the same city, with the same pictures by older men to serve as models.

The *Adoration* is clearly an experiment. Possibly the young painter was helped in this essay by his master and future father-in-law Pacheco, a hypothesis which would explain the points of difference between our picture and that other early composition by Velazquez, *The Adoration of the Kings* in the Prado, with its memories of Herrera. Close examination will reveal a number of places where the design has been altered and amended. The formal building up of the composition is effected with the conscious art of a novice, albeit a skilled one. The weak painting of several portions, notably the woman carrying a basket on her head, is another proof of the artist's inexperience. Even the faults of this figure, the leathery texture and clumsy forms, are found in other early works by Velazquez. Compare for example the arm with that of the servant girl in No. 1375. As in No. 1375 too we find a faint trace of Greco in the little fluttering angel in the sky, and the handling of the two small figures by the hovel in the background. The general treatment of the background suggests Bassano, who is the dominant influence in the Prado *Adoration*.

The colour of the picture, so far as we can now judge it, like the type and treatment of the Madonna, the handkerchief round the old woman's head, and the huge S. Joseph, may be borrowed from some work by Ribera. But the heads and hands of the three figures

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

bending before the Child cannot possibly be by anyone except Velazquez. Zurbaran never painted heads with such force, crispness and complete sense of form. Then consider the hands, notably those of the kneeling shepherd and the left hand of the old woman laid upon his shoulder. Those of the shepherd show the most marvellous observation of nature, that of the old woman is one of those superb feats of drawing which only one already a great master in embryo could ever have achieved. The head of the Child is another masterly passage, no less able, if less supremely vivid, than the similar head in the Prado picture. Next we may consider for a moment the hands of the other peasants. We shall find them to be of the same stubby shape as those in our No. 1375, while their brown colouring and the deft touches of light on the finger tips and nails survive in the work of Velazquez right up to the time of *Los Borrachos*. Zurbaran, as I have indicated, paints the hand quite differently. Again the dress of the old woman and the cloak of the boy in the foreground are rendered with a roundness and fullness which is peculiar to Velazquez. The cast of the folds of the boy's cloak alone would be enough to characterize the work as his, apart from any other evidence.

The longer indeed we examine the picture, the more certain must we become that the original attribution to Velazquez is the only attribution possible. The numerous inequalities, the differences from what we find in his other works, can be easily explained if we think of it as a boyish essay in the Grand Style, started



## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

about 1618 in the house of Pacheco, perhaps with the assistance of that learned master—an essay in which numerous borrowings from earlier sources are combined with that intense observation of the living model which characterized the young Velazquez from the first. Where, as in the figures of the rustics, he has nature to rely upon he succeeds perfectly. Where he has to paint the Madonna and St. Joseph, he turns to other painters for inspiration and so loses something of his own extraordinary force.

Some twelve years later (1629 to 1631) Velazquez was able to study the masters of Italy on their native soil. His own ideals were by this time so fixed and determined that even the work of the Venetians, much though he admired it, had but little effect upon his practice. Our picture of *Christ at the Column* (1148) is one of the few works by him in which the influence of Italy is paramount. The grey flesh tones, the poise of the head of Christ and of the kneeling child (S. Bridget), suggest that Guido, still living and famous, was here the inspiration and perhaps, in a sense, the competitor. For Guido in his best works displays a mastery both of brushwork and cool colour which even Velazquez could not disregard. Spurred it might seem by some such honourable rivalry, Velazquez has put his utmost power into the drawing of this admirable nude; proving that he could equal the Italians on their own ground. The hands alone seem to have given him some trouble; all the rest is done with consummate science and appearance of ease. In the figure of the angel we return to sober Spanish realism. In the

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

figure of the little girl we find a novel fluency of painting, allied to a sympathy with childhood which was afterwards to find more free and splendid expression in the portraits of the Spanish princes and princesses. The head of the little full length *Don Balthazar Carlos*, at Hertford House, is an easily accessible illustration. The figure of S. Bridget brings humanity and freshness into a composition otherwise austere academic, a freshness emphasized by the exquisite pale lavender of the dress, a thing of delight in the general pattern of greys and browns and dull purples.

In common with almost all the earlier pictures by Velazquez the handling in this picture is smooth and solid, so that such elements of vitality as it possesses are derived from the colour and tone contrasts, from the tension of the attitude of the central figure, and from the accentuation of this stress by the gesture and wings of the angel on the right. The execution, though solid and masterly, does not substantially contribute to the effect. In the next painting we have to consider, the famous *Philip IV when young* (1129), though it was done immediately after the return of Velazquez from Italy, and so probably, only a few months later than the *Christ at the Column*, we notice a great and sudden change. Large portions of the picture are still smoothly and broadly executed, but the silver-grey sleeves and the brocade on the brown dress are painted with extraordinary liveliness and freedom. The ground of the dress is no more than a rubbing of simple brown. Upon this the silver brocade is touched in with crisp separate strokes of

## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

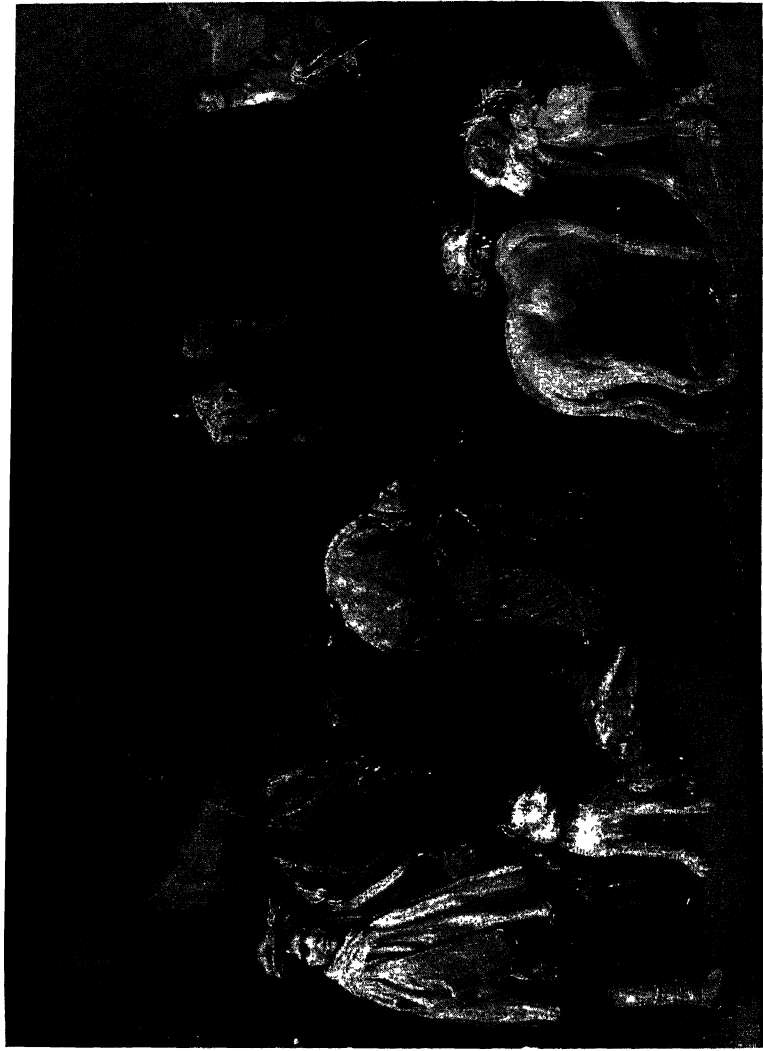
grey, so just in tone and so right in form that the result combines all possible truth with all possible vivacity.

As by a miracle, Velazquez appears suddenly to solve the appalling problem of the state portrait—of extracting life and vigour out of a stiff conventional pose, a costume, and a man by no means lively or vigorous. The perfect adaptation of the masses and contours to the picture space, the masterly modelling of the head, the exquisite craftsmanship in such details as the gloves, would by themselves have made a fine portrait. Indeed these qualities of spacing and clean direct execution have been studied and adapted by many modern portrait painters, with Whistler for their prophet and precursor. But in the majority of these admirable variations on the Velazquez theme, one quality is almost invariably lacking. They have Unity, they have Repose, they may have fine characterization and rhythm of design, but they have very little Vitality. The very carefulness with which the artists have had to set about their delicate task has deprived their work of life and fire. It may be artistic, but it is not stimulating. Even Whistler's *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, already mentioned, one of the very best of these modern essays, will be found, if compared with its Spanish prototypes, to be after all a somewhat drowsy and languid panel.

Where Velazquez learned the secret which enabled him to paint this *Philip* we can never know. Possibly he got a hint from some such great Venetian pattern-painter as Paul Veronese. More probably, as it seems



VELAZQUEZ  
PHILIP IV WHEN YOUNG



VELAZQUEZ : THE BOAR HUNT (DETAIL)

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

to me, this sudden freedom of handling was suggested by seeing anew the works of Greco. The superb figure of *S. Eugenio* in episcopal robes at the Escorial, or the famous *Burial of Count Orgaz* at Toledo, might easily have conveyed to an eye accustomed to the smoother manipulation of the Italians a sense of the value of crisply handled arabesque. Certainly from this time forward we find repeated instances where Velazquez has clearly borrowed and utilized Greco's colour and, once at least, his very design. After the death of Velazquez, the inventory made of his studio properties indicates that he owned no less than three of Greco's portraits.

It was desirable to emphasize the element of Vitality in our picture, because this is the one side of the art of Velazquez to which attention has not been so consistently directed as to his other great qualities. His fine perception of values, whereby the pattern of his portraits is adjusted with an equal eye for decorative harmony and natural appearance,—his command of cool silvery colour,—his superb gift of simplification and silhouette,—the certainty and fluency of his brush-work,—all these have been so recognized and appraised by able and eloquent critics that they are become matters of common knowledge. But the immense vigour combined with this subtle craftsmanship did not always receive its full credit, possibly because it was too often obscured by dirt and discoloured varnish. Had the unparalleled series of works by Velazquez in the Prado been cleaned fifty years ago, the trend of criticism would almost certainly have been somewhat different.

## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

We should have heard perhaps a little less about his good taste, but much more about his vigour.

Next in order of date among our pictures comes *Philip IV hunting the Wild Boar* (197), our single specimen of Velazquez as a landscape painter. The sufferings of the picture are now historic. When it was in Lord Cowley's collection, about the year 1840, it had to be relined, and owing to the use of too hot an iron many of the figures were reduced to mere ghosts. George Lance, the well-known painter of 'still-life' subjects, was called in by the unhappy cleaner, and in his evidence before the famous Committee of 1853 described what he had done to repair the damage. He stated that he had reinforced and mended all the sky and landscape, and many of the figures, practically repainting those in the right-hand corner. A comparison of the picture with an old copy still preserved in the Prado shows that this repainting, even if it was so considerable as Lance indicated, has now in a large measure disappeared. As the repair was done in water-colour, this is quite easily explained. But the picture has also darkened greatly. Its present heavy tonality gives no idea of the light touch (anticipating Gainsborough) and the greenish blues with which Velazquez has rendered the country at the foot of the Guadarrama in many of his portrait backgrounds. Still more unlike the dull tones of *The Boar Hunt* are those two silvery sketches in the Prado which Velazquez painted in the Garden of the Villa Medici at Rome, and in which he surpasses Corot. But by one of those freaks of Fortune, usually so unkind to painter's work,

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

the reproduction of our picture which is given in the English Edition<sup>1</sup> of Señor de Beruete's "Velazquez" (Plate XLV), restores to *The Boar Hunt* much of its vanished luminosity. There, without making any call on the imagination, the eye can travel past the shadows moving over the busy enclosure to the wooded slopes of the Pardo, looking just as they look to-day, the trees flecked with sunlight and swaying gently in the cool north wind as it lifts the drifting clouds across the sky behind.

Luckily the foreground figures towards the centre and to the left have suffered but little, so that here we still can see the true Velazquez without any artificial help. With what infinite spirit, freedom and solidity has he touched in the gentleman in the red cloak, the great boar-hounds and the boy in charge of them. Each of the figures seems to have been caught in an accidental momentary pose, to have been laid in with unerring force and certainty, and yet without any of that obvious cleverness and sleight of hand which too often accompanied this power of rapid notation. Canaletto, as we have seen, possessed this power, but rapidly became a mannerist from delight in his own facility. It is not the least virtue of the mind of Velazquez that it was proof against this subtle temptation. By keeping his eye fixed upon the variety of nature, he was saved from falling into any such manipulative tricks. Each new subject called for some fresh creative effort in handling, and so instead of indulging an early dexterity, which would in time have become

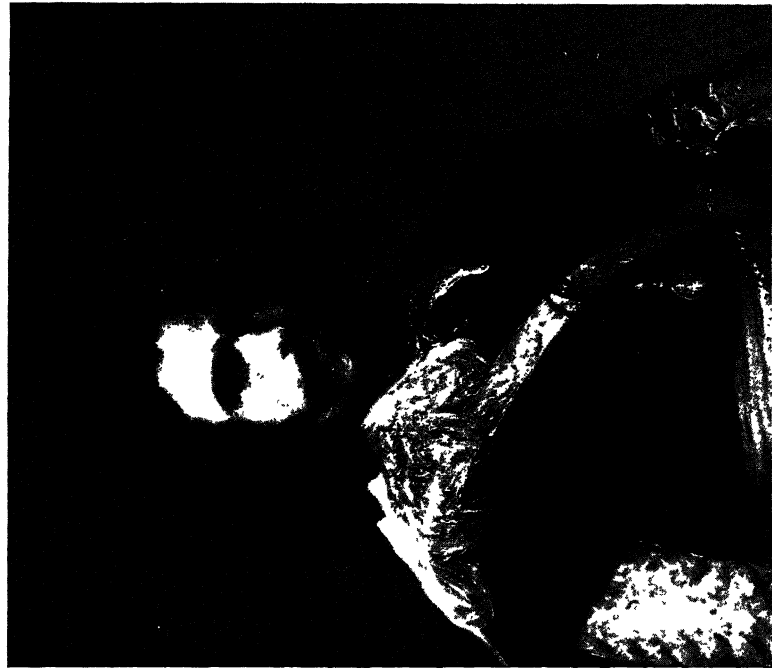
<sup>1</sup> London, Methuen, 1906.



## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

habitual and monotonous, Velazquez works his way from triumph to triumph.

For example, his portrait of *Admiral Pulido Pareja* (1315) is so different from the mass of his work that its authenticity has been contested. In effect it is powerful enough; but the handling is free to the verge of looseness, the silhouette of the legs, hat and cloak is less subtle than in many other works by the master; even the head appears rather more coarsely modelled than was the practice with Velazquez. But the technical method is identical with that of the head of the dwarf, *Don Sebastian de Morra*, in the Prado, notable for "its free, broad and powerful execution," to use Señor de Beruete's phrase. Each head is solidly almost roughly forced into shape; then the final notes of emphasis and expression are given by one or two sharp liquid touches of the kind used with so much effect by Van Dyck. The cutting stroke which accentuates the shadow of the dwarf's nose has its exact parallel in the similar touch by the Admiral's nostril. A similar stroke defining the tip of the nose will be found in the famous *Lady with a Fan* at Hertford House. The Admiral's lace collar, his sleeve and his gloves are handled with great freedom, but the freedom is that of a master, not of a pupil or copyist. Probably the differences are due to the fact that this fierce-looking warrior was unlike the princes and courtiers whom Velazquez was accustomed to paint, and that the artist tried on this occasion a more reckless, audacious and summary method, as being in harmony with the Admiral's appearance and temper.

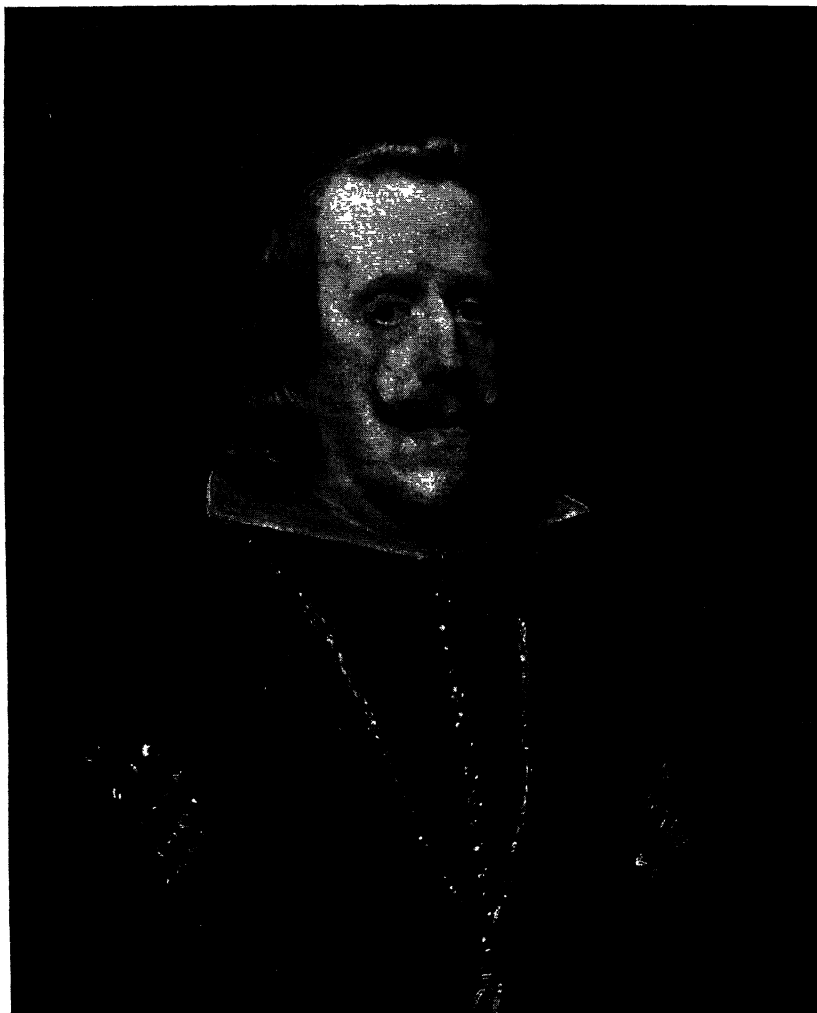


ADMIRAL PULIDO PAREJA (DETAIL)

VELAZQUEZ



DON SEBASTIAN DE MORRA (DETAIL)



VELAZQUEZ  
PHILIP IV WHEN ELDERLY

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

With this portrait we may contrast the famous *Philip IV when elderly* (745) painted some fifteen years later. Here the effect is one of extreme quiet and simplicity as befits an aging monarch. The rich black dress embroidered with gold, the narrow chain and little badge of the Golden Fleece and the plain stiff collar are the only accessories. The head is no longer painted with the firm decisive contours of sculpture, but the forms are merged in a soft silvery impasto, and defined here and there with a few crisp touches, on the nostril, the eye, and where the hair falls over the cheek. The subtle gradation of the tones, and the breaking of the colour give the head an atmosphere and mystery which are thoroughly in keeping with the sphinx-like reticence of the portrait. The king is tired and disillusioned, but still every inch a king, a being remote from our common humanity, with thoughts of his own which he will not utter, and a dignity so secure that we should not dare to question him.

To this final period of the master's work belongs also the *Venus and Cupid* (2057), commonly known as the "Rokeby" Velazquez, from the name of the house in which it formerly hung. Its repute has been increased by its sensational purchase in 1905 by the National Art-Collections Fund for £45,000, and by the attack made upon it by a fanatic in 1914. The picture well deserves its fame, for it is one of the painter's finest works, and does something to illustrate his power as a colourist, a power which only a visit to Madrid will exhibit completely. During the latter part of his career Velazquez came to occupy himself more and

## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

more with the problem of colour. The dresses of the Infantas, the scarves and trappings of the King or of Don Balthasar Carlos, gave him various opportunities of which he made good use. We can watch him passing gradually from colour schemes based upon Greco to novel experiments of his own. Of these works in the Prado, *Las Hilanderas* is perhaps the most wonderful. Fine as the design is, the colour in parts (the picture has been damaged by fire) is finer still. Indeed the group of ladies in the background examining the sunlit tapestry is one of the most lovely pieces of colour in the world : more tender than Rubens, more fresh and vivid than Watteau, and far more exquisite and subtle than the moderns, whom in luminosity it still rivals. The buffoon *Don Juan de Austria* is an experiment of another kind, which in its glow of transparent reds and purplish browns is like some unique Gainsborough. Strangely like Gainsborough too is the painting of *St. Anthony and St. Paul*; the broken grey of the rocks, the fluent greenish blues of the landscape and sky might well have come from the Englishman's brush, so identical do the touch and the pigments appear. I mention these pictures rather than the justly famous *Las Meniñas*, because in them colour plays a predominant part. In *Las Meniñas* design and atmospheric truth were the painter's objects, and he attained them, as we know, with triumphant success.

Our *Philip IV when elderly* is a proof, if proof were needed, of the delicacy to which Velazquez attained; the contrast of the blue-grey of the eyes with the subtle tones of the flesh, in which lemon yellow and pale red

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

and grey are so marvellously blended, has been equalled only by Correggio. The *Mars* and *The Coronation of the Virgin*, in the Prado, represent the opposite phase of his practice, when he indulges in the most forcible opposition of strong purplish reds and blues. The *Mercury and Argus* in the same Gallery is more dramatic in effect, but less fierce in colouring, owing to the use of black and white instead of blue as the principal foil to the reds and hot flesh tones.

In our *Venus and Cupid*, the single example of the female nude which the master is known to have painted, a similar scheme of colour re-appears, but modified now by the silvery tone of the Venus, and by a more 'classical' feeling for form and pigment. Though one of the most original of the master's later works, it is also one of the most deliberate in planning and execution. The long sweep of the draperies below and the folds of the curtain above emphasize the curve of the recumbent figure; the bend of her right arm, echoed by the bend of Cupid's knee, furnishes an abrupt contrast, while the lines of Cupid's body, of the mirror, and the edge of the white drapery to the left provide the necessary balance. So with the colouring; the black and white draperies below emphasize the fairness of the goddess by contrast of tone, as the deep rose of the curtain and the ruddy form of Cupid emphasize it by contrast of hue. This formal planning done, the artist seems to have devoted all his powers to the presentation of his model without idealization, but with the 'values' of nature so rightly adjusted on his canvas, that we have not only one of the most complete and delicate studies

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of the nude in existence (the drawing of the legs and of the hollow between the shoulder-blades might be instanced), but also the first and most successful of modern pictures. This latter quality was illustrated in 1919, when the *Venus* was hung for a short time between the two magnificent panels by Veronese, *Unfaithfulness* (1318) and *Happy Union* (1326). These panels had already proved formidable company for Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*, and had held their own fairly well when flanking Michelangelo's *Entombment*. The Velazquez emerged with credit even from this severe ordeal. The breadth and rhythm of its design were not crushed by the superb arabesques of the Venetian, while its colour was seen to be the very colour of cool daylight, and that of Veronese to be, after all, only old-master colour.

The professional painter will be surprised to find on close examination how varied, inside this appearance of unity, the master's execution has become. The principal figure and the large draperies are painted with considerable solidity and elaboration. Then we notice a scarf of green gauze near the waist of the goddess which is laid in with the loose transparency of a Goya. The shadowed parts of Cupid's body are a mere rubbing of thin colour upon the ground, over which the lighter portions are worked more solidly. We may notice too how the exquisite substance and contour of the leg is foiled by rough broken touches in the dark drapery just beyond. It seems to me that this infinite variety, in itself a condition of genius, is the quality which definitely separates Velazquez from

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

the most brilliant of his followers. Some of these seem to paint almost as precisely, but they do not know when to lose the unessential parts of form as he does. Others have equalled him in apparent force of effect, but their force is by comparison monotonous ; they do not know how to vary it with those crisp and subtle touches, which, as in the *Admiral Pulido Pareja* and the *Philip IV*, give life and shape and accent to more broadly handled passages. Van Dyck is one of the few other painters who possessed this inestimable secret, and who in virtue of their technical gifts deserve to be mentioned with Velazquez.

In the *Venus*, Velazquez anticipates the moderns by painting what he sees, not what he knows. The figure is realized not as an anatomical subject carefully built up from a scientific knowledge of the bones and muscles underlying the outward appearance, but from a careful representation of each delicate hollow and projection of which the eye is conscious. And the eye sees so truly, the hand is so perfectly trained, that the result is nature, neither 'improved' according to some academic canon, nor distorted to suit some intellectual theory. And still by some refinement of vision, some instinct for subtlety of tone, we are spared all the crudity with which such frank presentation has in later times been accompanied so often. Our *Venus* is no Olympian ; she is plainly only a posed model, but she is a model painted as Corot would have liked to paint her—an abstraction of bodily grace, lacking no doubt the attributes of a being divine and remote, but also entirely free from that element of the meretricious which 'realism' in these days so frequently implies.



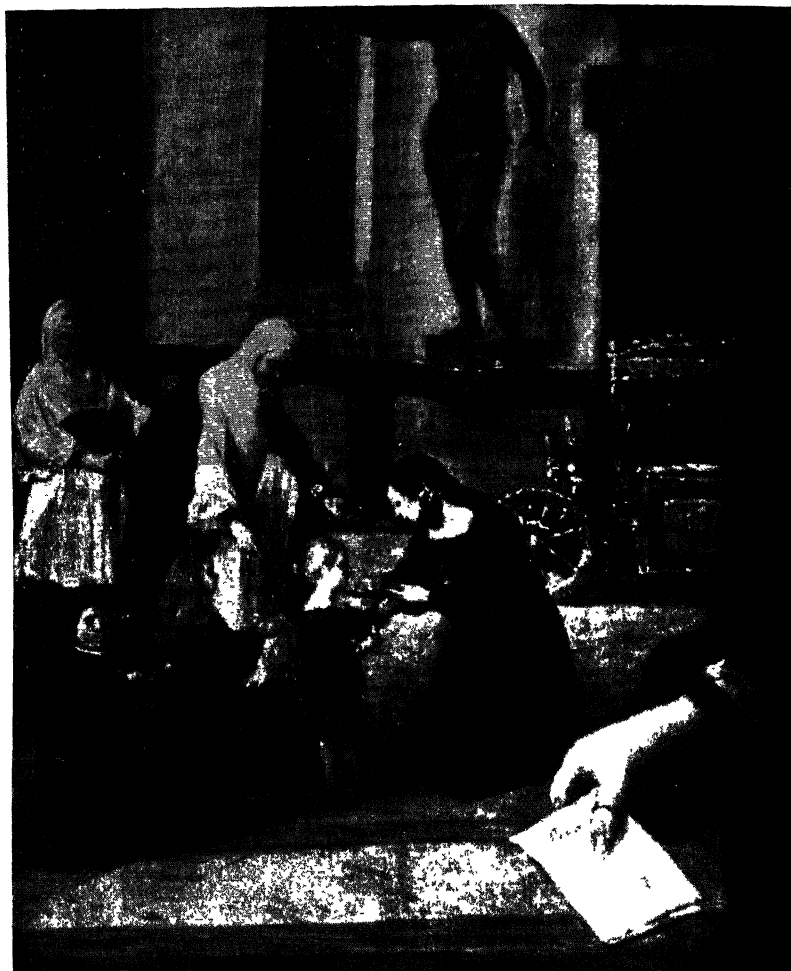
## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

A few words must suffice for two other pictures with which the name of Velazquez has been traditionally associated, No. 1434 and No. 741. The former long bore the name of *The Betrothal*, an obvious error, for which *The Morning Compliment* may with reason be substituted. Those who have followed these notes on the development of Velazquez will recognize at once that the painting contains no single feature characteristic of him. The drawing is weak, the painting monotonous, and the execution has nowhere the refinement or variety of the master. The striking design, the facility of handling, and the pleasant subject give it a certain charm. It has been attributed to the fertile Italian eclectic Luca Giordano, but the hands could never have been drawn so by one trained in Italy. Its technical qualities accord more closely with Claudio Coello, an attribution to which the modern Spanish critics assent. The *Dead Warrior* (741) offers a far more difficult problem. It does not resemble Velazquez, and it is unlike Ribera or Zurbaran, the two other Spaniards who might have been able to paint it. That it was painted in Italy, by some follower of Caravaggio, is the most reasonable hypothesis. Now that attention is being directed once more to the art of the Italian Seicento, it is quite possible that some other work establishing its authorship may be discovered.

Since the name of MAZO has been used so freely to account for any pictures by his father-in-law Velazquez which do not conform to the ideal Velazquez pattern, it may be well in concluding this chapter to notice the two works by him which the Gallery con-



VELAZQUEZ : VENUS AND CUPID



J. B. DEL MAZO  
MARIANA OF AUSTRIA (DETAIL)

## ZURBARAN AND VELAZQUEZ

tains. The *Duel in the Pardo* (1376) is a good example of Mazo's talent as a landscape painter; indeed it is lighter in touch and more luminous than the average of his work which in tonality is darker even than our *Boar Hunt*. But if we compare the *Boar Hunt* with the *Duel* we shall see in a moment that Mazo has no sense of form or structure or solidity. His trees are flimsy, his figures have no substance: they do not even stand firmly on their feet. There is a cavalier in red in each picture; a comparison between them should be enough to indicate the immense gulf which separates Velazquez from his facile son-in-law. The signed and dated portrait *Mariana of Austria* (2926) teaches the same lesson. Everywhere we find weakness in the forms, and a brushwork which, while it attempts to be free, is essentially timid. Look for example at the way the lady's hand is painted, or at the quite ludicrous legs of the little boy in the background group. The popular picture at Hertford House representing *Don Balthazar Carlos in the Riding School* has the same defects, but the design in that case is evidently taken from Velazquez. The treatment of the background, like that of *The Duel* and that of the *Mariana of Austria*, shows that Mazo had a real sense of atmospheric tone, and though it would be absurd to consider him as one whose work can ever be almost identical with that of Velazquez, he has a certain modest gift of his own which is not unpleasant.

## CHAPTER XV

### FROM MURILLO TO GOYA

THIRTY years ago the casual talker about the Spanish School would have coupled the name of MURILLO with that of Velazquez. Now we see that this conjunction implied so excessive an estimate of Murillo's power that we have gone to the other extreme, and treat him with a contempt which he does not wholly deserve. Let us admit at once that he is not a great artist like Velazquez. We shall find in him none of that master's earnest pursuit of the science of painting, none of his noble reticence and distinction, none of that varied technical accomplishment which increased and grew more daring right up to the moment of his untimely death. Murillo remains from first to last a provincial; self satisfied, facile and easy-going. His manner changes from time to time as in desultory fashion he is attracted by some novelty in the work of other men, or is driven by his own popularity to attempt something beyond his common round of accomplishment. But his temper through all these changes of technical method remains the same. Like Correggio he is one born with the desire to please, but unlike

## FROM MURILLO TO GOYA

him Murillo inherited neither a supreme technical gift, nor that curious sympathy with the vanished world of Paganism in virtue of which Correggio retains his place among the great. Murillo is always a son of the people, with a certain ready eloquence, a fund of quite commonplace ideas, and a genial outlook on life. His feeling for the picturesque and attractive side of religion appealed to the public fancy, from its contrast with the grim and austere devotions of the previous generation in Spain, while from its appropriateness to the temper of Neo-Catholicism it recommended Murillo to church patronage. Flattered by the popular applause, and never in want of important commissions, he had no external inducement to probe deeply into first principles, and he had in himself but little of the scholar's temper which drives a man to seek knowledge for its own sake.

Our examples of Murillo's work all belong to his maturity, and display his aptitudes more favourably, than a more complete series would do. From his want of solid knowledge and educated taste he is disconcertingly unequal. His execution is frequently so slipshod or common that any skilful copyist might easily produce a copy that was technically not inferior to the original painting, so the task of the expert who is called upon to distinguish between versions or variants of Murillo pictures may be exceedingly difficult.

Our *Spanish Peasant Boy* (74) shows him in a vein which even now, like the not dissimilar products of Greuze, retains a certain popularity. We must not look for any fine qualities of design or brush work, or

## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

colour, or psychology. We have merely an agreeable roguish urchin before us, painted with considerable skill and fluency, and with some attractive notes of blue and greenish-yellow and white. The *St. John and the Lamb* (176), though the sentimentality of it is alien to our taste, is really much less trivial. Even a painter might pause for a moment to admit that the lamb is a singularly skilful piece of work, and that the prevalent note of russet in the draperies goes most admirably with the fine bluish grey of the background. Indeed in these atmospheric backgrounds Murillo not infrequently sounds a note much more serious than we are wont to expect from him, and the effect can hardly be regarded as a mere trick, because it is often (as in this case), the result of a rather elaborate technical process. We could wish indeed that he had taken similar trouble with the head of S. John. The *Holy Family* (13) is a favourable specimen of Murillo's religious painting on a larger scale. We must admit that the various tones, in which russet brown is predominant, are pleasantly unified in a general vaporous atmosphere, but when this admission is made there is little more to be said. The Madonna, as usual, has the touch of provincial humanity which endeared Murillo to his Andalusian admirers; everybody else seems happy, and there is nothing particular in the composition to make us uncomfortable. But there is also nothing to stimulate us, no invention, no research, no effort of any kind, and we turn away from this drowsy *sfumato*, in the hope of finding something which has the substance and the breath of real life.

## FROM MURILLO TO GOYA

We might think that we have found it in the *Boy Drinking* (1286), which at present bears Murillo's name. But its very crispness and solidity have made the picture suspect, and it is almost certainly the work of some French admirer. For Murillo has had his admirers even among professional artists of much greater gifts. The *S. John Baptist* (3938), for example, in the Mond Collection, is known to have been copied by Gainsborough, and what interested Gainsborough we cannot wholly disregard. Even in *The Immaculate Conception* (3910), though the painting, except in a few of the cherubs' heads, shows Murillo in his most careless and perfunctory mood (he must have been bored at making so many repetitions of this popular subject), and though the types of the Madonna and the cherubs lack his wonted attractiveness, there is a certain corrupt harmony about the colour scheme of dark blue, white and gold, which when seen over the altar in some dim flord chapel might almost seem a fine invention.

The contemporaries and immediate successors of Velazquez painted a few not uninteresting pictures. The *Holy Family* (3647), by Antonio del Castillo, might serve as a good example of Spanish work based upon Italian models, in this case upon Bassano, with a certain novelty in the design and in the notes of red and orange. And there is Valdes Leal with his large *Assumption of the Virgin* (1291), in which a recent memory of Murillo is modified by a remoter memory of Rubens. There are two or three rather better Spanish painters of portraits or religious subjects who are unrepresented in our collection, but they contribute nothing really new to



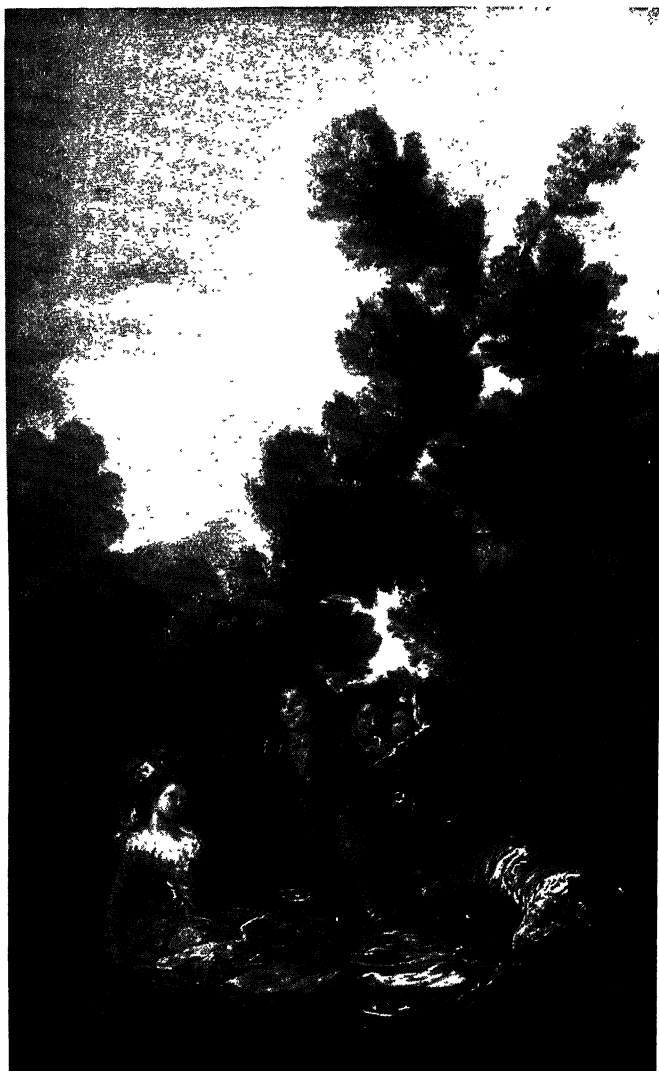
## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

the arts, so that their absence must be regretted on grounds historical rather than aesthetic. Not until the last decades of the eighteenth century did a new force arise, the genius of GOYA, whereby Spain once more assumed the lead among the artistic nations of Europe, and gave them an impulse which more than a hundred years later is still unexhausted.

The popular legend of Goya is hardly less full of incident than the autobiography of Cellini. He comes of peasant stock, his talent is discovered by an ecclesiastic, and he begins to study art at Zaragoza. At the age of twenty he flies—possibly from the Inquisition—to Madrid; is involved in we know not what plots and intrigues, and at last is found lying in the street with a dagger in his back. Recovering from the wound he escapes to the coast with a company of bull-fighters, and crosses to Italy. In Rome he is credited with other wild adventures, probably much exaggerated by rumour, like his earlier history. For we find him in 1771 winning the second prize at the Parma Academy for painting, the subject being *Hannibal gazing upon Italy from the Alps*, and starting in the same year upon work in the Cathedral at Zaragoza. This commission done, he seems to have visited Italy again, finally returning to Madrid in 1775. The forming of a friendship with the painter Louis David is the one definite incident of this Italian stay. We do not know what Goya studied, or where he acquired the elements of the style displayed in the designs for tapestry which were his first important achievement in Madrid.



MURILLO  
S. JOHN AND THE LAMB



GOYA  
THE PICNIC

## FROM MURILLO TO GOYA

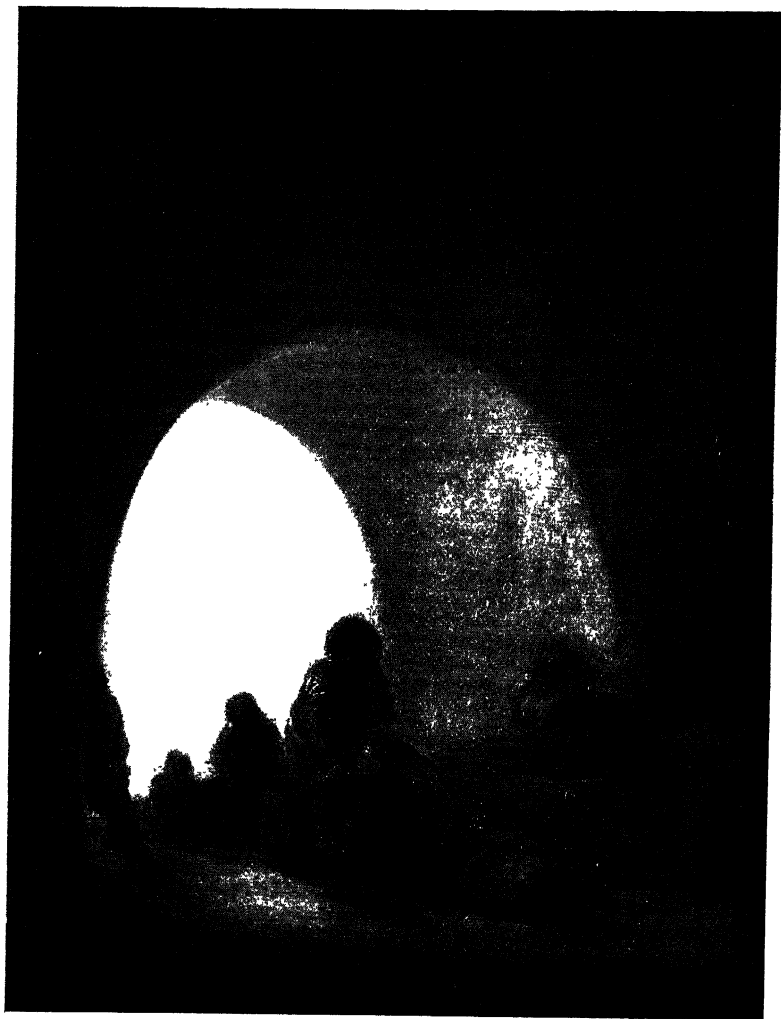
The subjects are taken from the national life of Spain, and are treated with singular audacity of design. But the freedom of the execution and the crudity of the bright colouring are still more remarkable, especially when we think of the period in which they were produced. They are like the work of some *jeune féroce* of to-day, gifted with a fertile fancy, contemptuous of all academic tradition, determined to break new ground, to experiment with the most vivid contrasts of tone and colour, and to find a subject matter entirely novel. Of Goya's work in this manner we can form some faint idea with the help of photographs and of our little painting *The Picnic* (1471). Imagine all the bright colours in this canvas to be made brighter still, and to be increased in mass. Imagine the fantastic feathery trees to be made still more fanciful, imagine the whole to be some eight or nine feet high, and the result will be something not unlike the paintings with which Goya made his *début* in Madrid. Pietro Longhi and others had of course already made good use of scenes from contemporary life, and Goya no doubt saw some of their work in Italy. But the vivid tones and colouring which he introduced were his own, and with them he blended that intense racial sympathy which is generally possessed in full measure only by those who are true sons of the soil. Goya through every social and political vicissitude remains intensely Spanish. He is a patriot when Spain is over-run by the French armies; he is a patriot when he sees her dominated by degenerate princes or by an all-powerful Church. He is indignant with pity for the downtrodden and the

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ill-used; he lashes oppression whenever he sees it with the whip of his terrible satire.

Two little pictures in the Gallery will serve to illustrate these characteristics. *The Prisoners*, lent by the Bowes Museum, is one of several paintings and etchings in which Goya has touched upon the tragic fate of those condemned for one reason or another to a prison cell. There is a similar and hardly less powerful painting of a madhouse. But what concerns us is not so much the spirit of the piece, as the art by which that spirit is conveyed. The great arch through which the light of the upper world sends its chilly reflection into this place of sorrow crowns a design worthy of Rembrandt—a design carried out with a lightness of touch and in a key of dainty greys and browns which form the strongest contrast possible to the coarser methods employed in *The Picnic*. In its way the little painting is a masterpiece.

But sympathy with the downtrodden, and with the everyday life of his fellow countrymen, formed but a small part of Goya's character. Had he confined himself to such subjects as these, and to such treatment as we have remarked in the two little pictures noticed, he would only have been one among many who towards the close of the eighteenth century prepared the way for the new freedoms and sincerities of the nineteenth. What gives Goya his unique position at the junction of the old ideas with the new is an immense, an almost unparalleled, creative fancy, covering an extraordinary range of subject matter and accompanied by a sense of design no less extraordinary. With a *saevo indig-*



GOYA  
THE PRISONERS  
(Bowes Museum)



GOYA  
THE BEWITCHED

## FROM MURILLO TO GOYA

*natio* like that of Swift, he attacked the faith, the superstitions and the follies of his time in a series of etched "Caprices," so audacious that the artist would have fallen under the ban of the Inquisitors but for the king's protection. The "Caprices" were followed, in the grim time of the French invasion, by a series representing "The Disasters of War." These with two later series, the "Tauromachia" and the "Proverbs," (incomplete and unpublished during Goya's lifetime), and with some magnificent lithographs, have secured for Goya a place with the very greatest artists in black and white, not so much on account of their technical skill, though that is usually considerable and often marvellous, as for the immense variety, originality and daring of the designs.

In the "Caprices" his fancy ranges from monks and gallants and fair ladies to the horrors of the charnel house and the Satanic revels of the witches' Sabbath, with an undercurrent of bitter anti-clericalism. Yet even when Goya is most sinister and diabolic he never loses his grip either upon reality or upon his art. In his most wild and savage designs the lines and tones and masses are compact and firmly knit together; the simplicity of the technical medium employed enables him to combine the human and the monstrous with no loss of congruity, and he never fails in keeping his hold upon real life, so that his fiends are no less convincing than his monks and his "Majas." It is this sense of reality, of things actually seen in the Spain of his time, which makes the "Disasters of War" so terrible, and which conveys to us the very thrill of the



## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

bull-fight when we look at the "Tauromachia."<sup>1</sup> Though the clue to the meaning of many of the plates in the "Caprices" and the "Proverbs" is now lost, and possibly some of them had no very definite significance apart from the design, these etchings compel us to recognize in Goya a temper at once savage and exquisite, a confirmed realist with an almost demoniacal fancy, lashing the folly, the vice and the brutality which he saw in the world about him, impatient of all conventional restraints, and yet expressing his turbulent emotions with a concentrated passion for design which the most austere academic might envy.

Our little picture of *The Bewitched* (1472) is thus no casual experiment, no mere illustration to a subject suggested by some playwright, but a thoroughly characteristic example of one aspect of Goya's temper. The atmosphere of mystery, the smiling fiend, the terrified priest, and the monstrous dancing of the mules in the background, are blended into complete unity by translucent tones of black and grey handled with supreme skill and judgment. Goya has used this method, or variations of it, again and again in a series of tragic designs in the Prado, one of the most ghastly among them being that of *Saturn devouring his own Children*. By dispensing for the most part with positive colour, he was able to rid himself of the difficulties which beset the painter who attempts to retain realism

<sup>1</sup> Small reproductions of most of these plates, and of Goya's chief paintings will be found in "Goya," by Albert F. Calvert. London: John Lane, 1908.

## FROM MURILLO TO GOYA

of hue when presenting the fantastic or the supernatural, and also to employ a breadth of treatment and a dramatic massing of broad lights and shadows which has found its way into modern art through men like Millet and Daumier. Indeed, after seeing these Spanish paintings it becomes evident that nearly all which we value in Daumier, as leading to a greater force and simplicity of design, was in reality Goya's invention. I say 'invention' deliberately. Though here and there we may detect a memory of men like Ribera, and Goya's etchings are undoubtedly influenced by the audacious designs and delicate skill of Tiepolo, the great mass of Goya's work is Goya's own, the outpouring of a rich, fiery and rather brutal nature through the channels of profound artistic science.

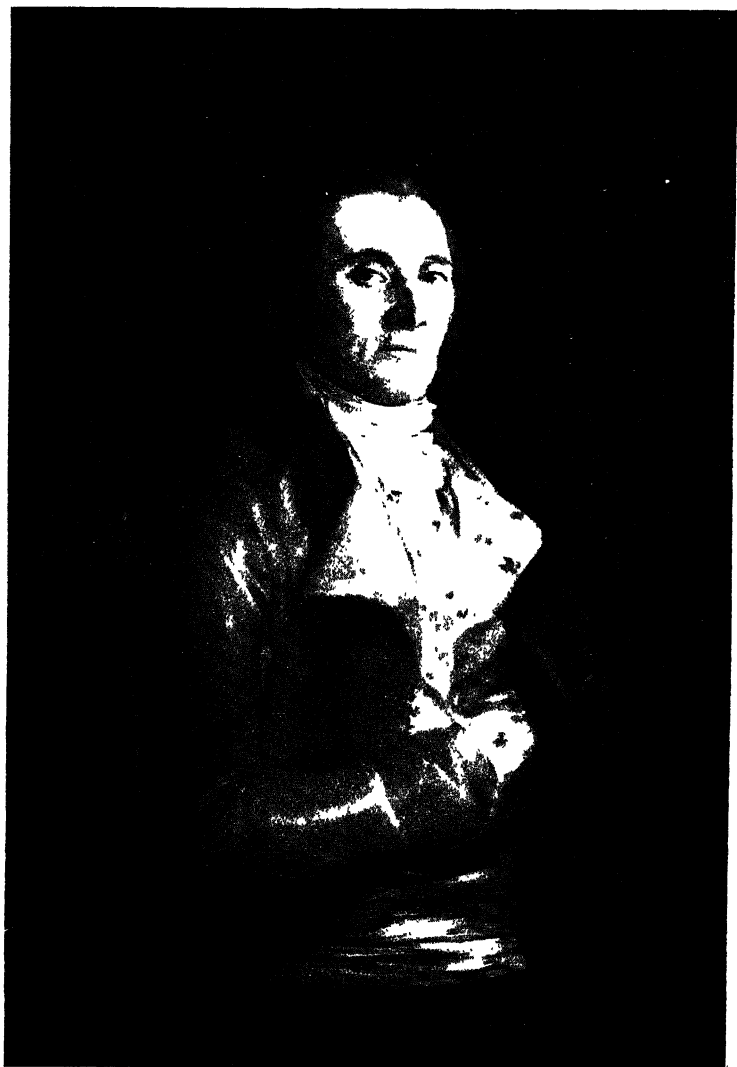
As a portrait painter Goya was hardly less remarkable. Making little or no concession to that tradition, recognized ever since the days of Van Dyck, whereby the artist is expected, if not to glorify his sitter, at least to present him in his happiest and most felicitous vein, Goya sees his models with the eye of a sardonic vivisectionist. If they have charm he is not blind to it, but if he sees any stiffness or folly or vice he delights in laying it bare. The wonder is that Goya should have been able to retain his position as painter to the court and society of Madrid, for of his sitters a number look sufficiently formidable or vicious to have punished their satirist, even if those were satisfied whom he represented as merely foolish. Where he saw force of character the painter could of course render it with rare spirit, whether in the great men of the day or in

## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

the person of some toreador. His painting of the Duke of Wellington, for example, is the single likeness of that commander which shows the nervous fire and imagination under the frigid mask with which our portraitists have made us familiar. If we take Goya's portrait as representing the real Wellington, we can easily understand how after defeating Napoleon's Marshals he proved, not perhaps without some good fortune, a match for the Emperor himself.

Possibly, as most portrait painters have done, Goya gave to many of his men sitters a little of his own nervous temperament. But of the vitality and individuality of his presentments there can be no question, as the two portraits which we possess will sufficiently prove. The *Dr. Peral* (1951) is almost disquieting in its revelation of personality. The stiffness of the pose, the keen suspicious glance of the eye, the pallid face, the mouth ever so slightly awry, make up a record as complete as a description by Tolstoi. And to this liveliness and subtlety of characterization there is added an art as refined in its way as that of Gainsborough. The scheme of silver grey and white, with faint hints of positive colour, is of the simplest. The touch is a true painter's touch, rapid and seemingly careless. Yet the modelling of the head, a singularly difficult feat in the pose and lighting selected, leaves nothing to be desired.

In some other cases this facile handling is carried to the verge of flimsiness, and in the strong light of our top-lit galleries the more directly painted passages look a little thin and flashy compared with the work of men



GOYA  
DR. PERAL



GOYA

DONA ISABEL CORBO DE PORCEL

## FROM MURILLO TO GOYA

like Velazquez. This was noticeable when some of the famous Goyas from Madrid were shown in the searching light of Burlington House. But in Spain these very same figures reassume their solidity, because they are seen there under the same conditions as those which prevailed when Goya painted them; that is to say in rooms where the blaze of Southern sunlight penetrates only by reflection. The soft illumination striking at the canvases from below envelops them with light and atmosphere. The appearance of flimsiness in the painting vanishes, the figures take on substance and majesty, while above from comparative twilight the faces look down mysterious, sinister and triumphant.

*Dona Isabel Corbo de Porcel* (1473) is a portrait which has suffered a little in the past at the hands of the restorer. The white drapery at the neck has been flattened, the half tones of the face and hands have lost their pristine freshness. But the portrait still shows the force with which Goya could render a certain type of Spanish beauty. The vivacity of the pose, with a hand on either hip, is echoed by the lively sweeping strokes with which the mantilla is painted over the splendid satin dress. Note for example the painting of the sleeve; Gainsborough himself would have respected such superb craftsmanship. Indeed it is with Gainsborough that Goya, like Velazquez, has technically very much in common. In the case of Velazquez we have also a vast traditional knowledge and a long experience of solid realism, while Goya reveals a temper less equable, a genius naturally more

## THE SPANISH SCHOOL

defiant of authority, but which in range, in real originality and in imaginative vision rivals that of his Japanese contemporary Hokusai.

The later phases of Spanish painting have more than once achieved a certain contemporary repute. There is for example the brilliant virtuoso Fortuny, who dazzled men's eyes in the nineteenth century. Our *Matador* (3138) bears witness to his skill of hand, his mastery of sparkling light and colour, but compared with Goya how superficial in vision and frivolous in outlook ! And in our own day two or three Spanish painters uphold their national tradition not unworthily ; and would perhaps occupy an even higher place, were they not to some extent overweighted by the very greatness of their artistic heritage—by the necessity of seeming to follow in the footsteps of Greco, Velazquez and Goya.

## APPENDIX

### THE "SECRET" OF THE VAN EYCKS

As our knowledge of the relics of mediaeval painting increases we are gradually acquiring a clearer view of the background of technical tradition from which the brothers Van Eyck appeared so suddenly. The use of oil whether as a final glaze over work executed in size or egg-tempera, or as a vehicle for painting the rich colours of draperies while the faces and hands were still painted in tempera, or, more rarely, as a vehicle for painting the whole of a picture, was recognized by the craftsmen of the fourteenth century. But the general character of the work thus executed, and the extant recipes relating to it (like those of Cennino Cennini), indicate that the oil must have been a somewhat thick and intractable material, rarely adapted either to refinements of colouring or to delicate manipulation. An increasing body of opinion favours the theory (for so in the absence of direct documentary evidence it must remain) that an emulsion of oil and size was the medium used in many cases where, from the absence of stippling or definite brush strokes, we see that the painting was not done in his ordinary egg-tempera method. But there is evidence to show that in one art centre at least, the use of oil-varnish as a vehicle was tolerably well understood by the latter half of the fourteenth century. Unless we are to set aside the generally accepted dates, we must admit that the painters of Cologne had learned to clarify oils and varnishes tolerably well by the time of Hubert van Eyck. If, as appears probable, Hubert learned the practice of his art at Cologne, the perfection to which he brought the preparation of his materials was no more than an improvement upon the relative perfection attained by the earlier Cologne Masters.



## THE "SECRET" OF THE VAN EYCKS

One of the most typical features in the painting of the Cologne and allied Schools is the fresh apple-green which we may see in our *Three Saints* (705), by Stefan Lochner, and in the Franco-Rhenish *Holy Trinity* (3662). This copper-green is a pigment which retains its freshness only when it has been 'locked up,' and so preserved from moisture, in a varnish or balsam. Its presence in these and other paintings contemporary with the Van Eycks, accompanied by other colours (notably fine rosy-reds) of similar translucency and richness, is sufficient to show that the Van Eycks had no complete technical monopoly in the matter of resinous or oleo-resinous vehicles of very fair quality. Yet these vehicles appear to have been unsuitable for painting delicate flesh-tones and the like. In pictures of the Cologne and other Schools the faces and hands are frequently executed in some sort of tempera, while for the strong colours of the draperies the medium is no less evidently a varnish. In the work of the Van Eycks the oleo-resinous vehicle has been so perfectly clarified that it can be used for the most delicate flesh-tones as well as for the stronger colours, and that is the essence of their 'secret.'

By the completion of Hubert's 'invention' at Ghent, by the famous work which he executed there, by the immense repute of his brother John and the Netherlandish Masters who came after the two great brothers, the glory of the improved process passed to Flanders. Yet all the while the School of Cologne was at work extending its methods in Burgundy, in France, and to the South, so that during the first part of the fifteenth century we find many paintings in oil which owe nothing to the 'invention' of Hubert van Eyck. But the Van Eyck method proved ere fifty years had passed to be superior to all others. It gradually came into universal employment, and the older Cologne practice out of which it had developed was gradually superseded and forgotten.

The account of the Van Eycks' improvements of the materials previously employed by painters which was given by Sir Charles Eastlake in Chapters VIII, IX and X of his "Materials for a History of Oil Painting" (First Series), has never as yet been superseded. The linseed or nut oil used by the Van Eycks' fore-runners was prone to discoloration and dried badly. The Van Eycks learned how to bleach and to purify these oils, and

## THE "SECRET" OF THE VAN EYCKS

to accelerate their drying quality by the addition of calcined white copperas. It may be noted that, in warm weather at least, linseed oil when used as a medium on a non-absorbent white ground will imitate very closely many of the effects obtained by the early Netherlandish masters. But the film of paint so produced is comparatively soft and is damaged by the least abrasion, nor does it naturally produce those differences in thickness of substance which occur so constantly in fifteenth-century work, and which can only be explained by the use of varnish. This varnish of the Van Eycks, in its turn, was no more than an improvement of the oil-varnishes which had for ages been in common use as a finish for tempera pictures. Amber or sandarac, dissolved in linseed or nut oil, were the usual materials. Often the older varnishes were very dark owing to imperfect choice and preparation of these constituents. Equally detrimental to their clearness was the partial carbonization resulting from the heat required to unite the oil with the resin. Even when every known precaution was taken to mitigate these evils the resulting oil-varnish was comparatively deep in tone, and so remained unsuitable for use with delicate colours. For these a thinner varnish was made in which the resinous element was supplied by turpentine, naturally a far softer and weaker substance than amber or sandarac, but reported (I have had no personal experience with it) to make an extremely durable compound when mixed with a drying oil.

The improved painting materials used by the Van Eycks would thus appear to have been :

(1) Linseed or nut oil, bleached and refined by processes analogous to those in use to-day with calcined white copperas for a dryer. In this oil the colours were ground. It was also a compound of the two oil varnishes employed.

(2) Amber or sandarac varnish made with the refined drying oil. As this was apt to be dark in tone it could only be used with the stronger colours. It would appear indeed that the brownest and thickest specimens of this varnish were reserved for mixing with strong dark pigments and in backgrounds, where its deep natural tone would not be a disadvantage. Such passages in Netherlandish painting are usually of much thicker substance than the rest of the picture.

(3) A varnish made of a white resin, apparently purified

## THE "SECRET" OF THE VAN EYCKS

turpentine, and the improved drying oil. This was used for all the lighter and more delicate tones, as such flesh-tints.

The colours were ground in oil, but were not mixed with the appropriate varnish till the moment when the painter was about to apply them. Naphtha, according to Eastlake, was the diluent used when the compound was too stiff to work conveniently, but on this point the evidence is not complete. The epitaph of Hubert mentions his knowledge of 'Medicine.' It is therefore possible that he was familiar with distillation, and that the production of spirit of turpentine or of alcohol was part of his 'secret.' In these days we generally employ copal instead of amber for our varnish, and turpentine or petroleum as a diluent in place of naphtha, but to all intents and purposes the materials for oil-painting as improved by Hubert van Eyck were the same as those which are still in common use.

It deserves to be noted that the improvement was not effected all at once. The materials used in the famous picture in the Cook Collection—*The Three Maries at the Sepulchre*—are not so perfect as those used in *The Adoration of the Lamb*, which belongs to Hubert's last years, when his experience was ripe. In the earlier work the lighter tones are much less clear, and there is a general tendency to brownish-red, which indicates that the painter at this period of his career had not fully solved the problem of rendering his varnish colourless. Hubert's successors were not always quite happy with their materials. I fancy the unpleasing brownish flesh-tones in certain works by John van Eyck must be due to an unsatisfactory making of varnish and, as Eastlake notices, we see similar inequalities in the paintings of Antonello da Messina. The fashionable painters of Antwerp at the close of the fifteenth century appear to have had materials of uniform excellence at their disposal; nowhere do we find colours more brilliant or surfaces more glossy. Provincial artists of the same period are not only more rude in their workmanship, but employ oils and varnishes which in some cases appear hardly better than those in use before Hubert van Eyck started his experiments. The aim and result of those experiments was not the invention of new painting materials, but a refinement of the existing materials. That refinement, as any student of the subject will recognize, was a most elaborate business, calling for expert technical

## THE "SECRET" OF THE VAN EYCKS

knowledge, and also for an expenditure of time and care which made the results as precious as, in the absence of accurate chemical analysis, they must frequently have been uncertain.

The knowledge, skill and attention which these refining processes required may explain one difficulty by which the students of early painting in the Netherlands have been puzzled. More than once we find artists of considerable standing in their guilds, and of mature years (Roger van der Weyden for example), coming to serve as apprentices or assistants to some famous master. It is clear that they could not have done this merely to learn over again the business of working with the pen or the brush. Is it not probable that their motive in coming to some practitioner in the new style was to learn from him the secret of preparing the improved oils and varnishes with which he worked? These refining processes could not be thoroughly mastered except by continuous training under the eye of a man who understood them. Reliance upon written recipes alone would be certain to lead to partial failure, or at least to no more than intermittent success, so that an actual apprenticeship in the studio of an expert was a necessity, even for those who, so far as executive power and experience went, were already recognized masters.

# CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

TO ILLUSTRATE THE RELATION OF THE ITALIAN MASTERS TO  
THOSE OF OTHER PARTS OF EUROPE.

	FLORENCE AND CENTRAL ITALY.	VENICE AND NORTHERN ITALY.	GERMANY AND THE NETHERLANDS.	FRANCE, SPAIN AND ENGLAND.
1200	Margaritone Cavallini Cimabue			
1250	Duccio Giotto P. Lorenzetti			
1300	A. Lorenzetti Orcagna Spinello			
1350	L. Monaco Fra Angelico		R. Campin Van Eyck	
1400	Paolo Uccello Masaccio	Pisanello	Dirk Bouts Stefan Lochner	
	A. Pollaiuolo	{ Bellini Antonello Mantegna	Memling	J. Fouquet S. Marmion
1450	Leonardo Michelangelo Raphael	Giorgione Titian	{ Mabuse Durer Cranach	
1500	Bronzino	Correggio Tintoretto Veronese	Holbein Antonis Mor P. Brueghel	Morales F. Clouet J. Bettes Greco
1550	Baroccio L. Carracci Caravaggio Guercino		Rubens Frans Hals Van Dyck Rembrandt Terborch Hobbema Van der Werff	Poussin { Velazquez Claude Murillo Kneller Rigaud Watteau Hogarth Wilson Reynolds Goya
1600	Sassoferrato Salvator Rosa			
1650		Piazzetta { Tiepolo Canaletto Guardi		
1700				
1750				

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